P.T. Barnum Presents: The Greatest Classroom on Earth! Historical Inquiry into the Role of Education in Barnum's American Museum

by

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Approved by
Supervising Committee:

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Dedication

For my family, who encouraged me to pursue my academic dreams.

And for Eric, who supported me and wouldn't let me quit.

Abstract

P.T. Barnum Presents: The Greatest Classroom on Earth! Historical Inquiry into the Role of Education in Barnum's American Museum

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This study of P.T. Barnum's American Museum challenges readers to examine Barnum in a new light. An argument is made that P.T. Barnum was a successful museum educator whose philosophies and actions align with three modern museum education discourses: free-choice learning, constructivism, and edutainment. These findings challenge the commonly-held belief that Barnum was simply a showman, best known for his work in the circus and for a quote that has been mis-attributed to him that, "there's a sucker born every minute."

The research undertaken for this investigation focuses on museums and education in the nineteenth century. This study presents a brief history of the emergence of museums in America, spanning the years 1782–1841. Six museum proprietors are discussed in accordance with their beliefs in three educational philosophies: popular education, useful education and didactic education. A focus is then made towards P.T. Barnum and his American Museum. A brief biography of Barnum prior to his career as a museum proprietor is included. The holdings and organization of the American Museum is described, revealing some of the influence it had on nineteenth-century culture.

The thesis concludes by illustrating how Barnum's American Museum exemplified three forms of education: free-choice learning, constructivism, and edutainment. In it I argue that Barnum was an effective museum educator and his legacy should reflect this important feature of his character.

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Chapter 1: *Introduction to the Study*

P.T. Barnum is largely remembered for his work as a showman, perhaps spurred by the traveling circuses that still bare his name. However, most of his life's work was devoted to the early public museum movement in America, as Barnum was the proprietor of a New York City institution called the American Museum (1841-1868). His work in this field stood out due to the breadth and quality of his collections, as well as for his tireless promotions and constant improvements to his facilities.

Not only was Barnum's museum the first in America to exhibit a living hippopotamus and whale, but it was also the first building in New York to install Drummond lights (limelight) on the rooftop, "illuminating Broadway from the Battery to Niblo's" (Harris, 1962, p. 54). His museum remained open from 7 a.m. until 10 p.m., profiting from the increase of leisure time allotted to Americans in industrialized urban cities such as New York. Among its fine arts collection, visitors could find Peale's "Gallery of American Portraits," a "Photograph Art Gallery," and "artistically carved ornamental ivory jewelry." According to present-day exhibition text at Barnum's Museum in Bridgeport, Connecticut:

> Barnum's American Museum was a place for family entertainment, enlightenment, and instructive amusement. Showcasing natural curiosities alongside artistic, mechanical, ancient, and historic exhibitions, Barnum created a temporal shrine for advancing public knowledge of science, fine arts, music, literature and the marvels of nature.

Barnum bridged the gap that existed between the elite, private museum collections held by wealthy citizens or philosophical societies, and the Dime Museums that operated purely for entertainment and profit: "His museum was the prototype — all later museums followed his pattern" (Dennett, 1997, p.xi). While historians have recognized Barnum's American Museum as a popular destination for citizens of all

classes in nineteenth-century New York City, it is yet to be lauded for its educational contributions. This research was undertaken to correct this oversight and to discover what educational policies (explicit or implied) were offered to the public through his museum.

CENTRAL RESEARCH QUESTION

P.T. Barnum's American Museum in New York City exposed millions of visitors to displays of art, theater, and natural and artificial wonders between 1841 and 1868. What specific role did education play in Barnum's museum, and what educational methods did Barnum and his staff employ when engaging visitors in the museum—particularly within those exhibits that focused the visitors' attention on art and artifacts?

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Museums today are constantly competing with longer workweeks, popular entertainment, and a variety of other factors for the public's attention. This is not a new phenomenon. As we can learn from studying Barnum's museum in its context, this was a challenge Barnum faced during his reign as the proprietor of the most popular museum in America.

While we can assert through ticket sales that he was largely successful in drawing the public in, my research looks at what the potential was for a person's visit to the museum to be both entertaining and educational. My research reveals, and I argue here, that a balance was achieved between education and entertainment in Barnum's American Museum.

MOTIVATIONS FOR RESEARCH

According to Aristotle, "If you would understand anything, observe its beginning and its development." As a practitioner of museum education, I do not believe the origins of our field have been significantly investigated. Current issues in the field are being addressed through institutional collaborations and conferences, but by looking at the birth of public museums in America we may find that some of the issues we are struggling with today parallel those that occurred in museums of the past. This added information may help us in the development of new solutions to contemporary issues and questions.

My research will contribute new information to the field about the history of museum education, and it is also intended to help correct misconceptions about the museum experience that P.T. Barnum provided for his visitors. The legends that surround him almost always focus on his "humbugs" or moneymaking schemes, but I do not think history has treated him fairly in this way. By reporting his legitimate educational contributions, I hope to give new importance to this American folk hero and his museum.

Finally, the site at Broadway and Ann Street in New York City where Barnum's original American Museum stood for over twenty years is completely void of any historical markers. The further I delve into Barnum's life, the more I am inclined to believe this omission has been an unfair oversight. Barnum made history on this street corner, and this effort deserves to be recognized. If I can bring enough attention to the importance of this issue, I hope to rectify this oversight.

RESEARCH METHOD

I examined Barnum's museum as it existed in the mid-nineteenth century; therefore, a historical research methodology was best suited for my study. I consulted a variety of materials, including but not limited to: books, newspaper clippings, correspondence, museum guidebooks, illustrations, advertisements, ledgers, web-materials, and video documentaries. Primary source materials were favored so that I could find the most reliable information available about the art collections and educational practices at the museum (areas largely unexplored in most secondary sources on Barnum).

DEFINITION OF TERMS

- Barnum's American Museum: The two successive museums in New York City that P.T. Barnum owned and operated between the years 1841 and 1868. The first was located at Broadway and Ann Street, while the second was located further uptown at Broadway and Spring Street.
- Constructivism: An educational theory that "postulates that learning requires active participation of the learner in both the way that the mind is employed and in the product of the activity, the knowledge that is acquired" (Hein, 1998, p. 34).
- Dime museum: Privately owned, popular amusement centers of the nineteenth through early twentieth century. Dime museums varied greatly in their programs, and offered a mixture of entertainments including exhibitions, theater performances, and live attractions. Admission generally ranged from ten to fifty cents.
- Educational: Intended to inform, instruct, enlighten, or advance the knowledge or worldview of an individual

- Edutainment: A blending of entertainment with educational purposes.
- Entertainment: Something that offers a person pleasure, diversion, or amusement.
- Free-Choice Learning: A non-linear, personally motivated style of learning that involves considerable choice on the part of the learner as to what to learn, as well as where and when to participate in learning (Falk & Dierking, 2000, p.xii).
- Guidebook: A publication that accompanies a museum's collection or building.
- Iconoclasm: "The tendency to assume that the educational heroes in past historical accounts should not be regarded as heroes at all, but as actors or agents who promoted a particular social class perspective or agenda" (Efland, 1995, p. 119).
- Isolationism: "The tendency to study the history of art education in isolation from its embedding contexts" (Efland, 1995, p.119).
- Lecture room: A theater space within some nineteenth-century museums. Barnum's lecture room was expanded to accommodate over 3,000 visitors at a time (Saxon, 1989, p.106).
- Museum: Diverse institutions that at their core make a "unique contribution to the public by collecting, preserving and interpreting the things of this world" (American Association of Museums, 2000).
- Presentism: "The tendency to assume that the present ways of viewing things was also prevalent during the historical period in question" (Efland, 1995, p.119).
- Public Taste: "The aesthetic knowledgeability, experience, and preferences of the entire population" (Harris, 1978, p. 141).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Barnum had a long and fascinating career, but for the interest of this study, I limited the majority of my research and reporting to the period from 1841-1868, the years when Barnum owned and operated his American Museum. It included information from both the museum located at Broadway and Ann Street, which burned completely in 1865, and the later incarnation at Broadway and Spring Street. Outside these time parameters I found it useful and important to include some biographical information about Barnum. This was incorporated only for its value in helping to understand Barnum and his life between 1841-1868.

Two museums of similar names must also be addressed here, as they are not to be considered as subjects for this study, though they certainly proved to be rich sources for information relating to the New York museum: the Barnum Museum at Tufts College in Medford, Massachusetts and the Barnum Museum in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Both were created with endowments from Barnum's considerable fortune and remain in operation today.

Within the study I focused primarily on the work and ideas of P.T. Barnum himself. However, educational ideas or policies that arose from employees at his American Museum were also included.

Chapter 2: *Literature Review*

Fortunately, several published works are available that guided me in my research. I have divided this literature review into six sections: works written by Barnum, works written about Barnum and his American Museum, publications from Barnum's American Museum, works that provide historical context, readings on museum education, and readings about using a historical research methodology. Each section highlights a few of the leading sources consulted in my research.

WORKS WRITTEN BY BARNUM

P.T. Barnum was a prolific writer. This is demonstrated through the meticulous accounts of his life in two autobiographies, the numerous articles and editorials he contributed to newspapers, and the thousands of pieces of correspondence that remain in various archives and private collections throughout the United States. These written accounts have provided me with access to Barnum's thoughts, beliefs, and sense of humor.

The first of two autobiographies, The *Life of P.T. Barnum Written by Himself* (1855) was published when Barnum was forty-four years old. While this may seem like a young age for a man to write his autobiography, Barnum had already achieved worldwide recognition through his American Museum and tours with his midget protégé General Tom Thumb and the singer Jenny Lind. According to Saxon (1989), this early biography at times reads "almost like a picaresque novel, at others like a strange medley of jokes, anecdotes, and homilies" (p. 16). After publishing his first work, Barnum continued to document his life in writing.

Barnum seemingly never considered his second autobiography, *Struggles and Triumphs; Fourty Years' Recollections of P.T. Barnum. Written by Himself (1873),* a

finished work. Several later editions with amendments and appendices were published, changing the subtitle from *Fourty Years' Recollections* on to *Fifty* then *Sixty Years' Recollections*. Interestingly, Barnum does not pick up where he left off in the first autobiography, but instead expands on some of the subjects including his early life, the museum, and his world tours.

Both autobiographies were wildly popular: "Barnum once boasted that over a million copies of his autobiography had been sold during his lifetime, and his estimate was probably a conservative one" (Saxon, 1989, p. 22).

In addition to the autobiographies, thousands of letters by Barnum still remain to provide researchers with primary source materials. Barnum biographer A.H. Saxon selected more than three hundred pieces of correspondence to publish in *Selected Letters of P.T. Barnum* (1983). His goals for the selections were to give readers a thorough chronological sampling of Barnum's correspondence, as well as to highlight his most famous endeavors and to reveal letters written to other notable figures from the nineteenth century.

Most of the letters include contextual notes and interpretations written by Saxon, a highly regarded contemporary Barnum scholar. These introductions are valuable for the information they provide about the recipient of each letter, as well as any actions that occurred as a result of the information exchanged.

WORKS WRITTEN ABOUT BARNUM AND HIS MUSEUM

Since Barnum's death in 1891, several biographers have reinterpreted his autobiographies, examined his archives, and attempted to look at his life through new lenses. For the purposes of this study, I have limited my selections to contemporary

authors and works that provide the most information about Barnum's early career with the museum (rather than his later focus on the circus).

The principle P.T. Barnum biographer is A.H. Saxon, as evidenced by the multiple, in-depth publications that Saxon has tendered over a thirty year span. His biography, *The Legend and the Man* (1989), is extremely detailed and spans Barnum's entire life. Saxon used extensive primary source material for his book, which sets him apart from earlier researchers who relied almost entirely on Barnum's published autobiographies. Although he never specifically discusses education or Barnum's art collection, Saxon does provide detailed endnotes that I used to locate sources in my search for more information related to my topic.

Even more useful to me as a researcher seeking primary resources was Saxon's limited publication of *Barnumiana: A Select, Annotated Bibliography of Works By or Relating to P.T. Barnum* (1995). Though not entirely up to date, it provided detailed descriptions of the holdings found in archives and collections throughout the country, and listed numerous other secondary sources published prior to 1995.

Unlike Saxon's other publications, this limited edition bibliography includes many of Saxon's own thoughts and opinions on Barnum and the direction of research that other writers have explored. Saxon comes across as close-minded toward new interpretations, and is not fond of authors who examine Barnum and his writings under contemporary lenses. The next two authors, Neil Harris and Bluford Adams, do just that, and have been guiding forces for my own research, which layers contemporary discourses of art education over Barnum and his practices.

One of the most respected Barnum biographers of the twentieth century, Neil Harris (1973) was the first to examine Barnum through the lens of cultural studies. His background as an art historian and museum scholar gives Harris' study the unique ability

to describe Barnum's museum in terms already within the field of museums and museum education. A full quarter of *Humbug: The Art of P.T. Barnum* focuses specifically on Barnum's American Museum, while the remaining sections provide the reader with a clear biographical history of Barnum's life. This contrasts with the approach of Bluford Adams, who selects specific aspects of Barnum's professional career to dissect.

According to the author, Adam's book on Barnum (1997) "sets out to explore the nineteenth-century America's need not just for Barnum, but for the larger popular culture connoted by his name" (Adams, 1997, p. xi). Rather than tender another straightforward biography of the showman, Adams (1997) gives the reader an examination of "Barnum's role as a purveyor of public amusements," and an investigation of "the social and political forces that produced the need for Barnumesque culture" (p. xi). The result is a focus on five aspects of Barnum's career in historical context, one of which was the American Museum.

Also of interest in this volume is the way Adams examines the American Museum's Lecture Room through a political lens. The lecture room was used to present a variety of plays, showcase living curiosities, and for Barnum to address his visitors each year. Adams (1997) posits a hypothesis that Barnum was presenting not only entertainment, but also political viewpoints through his selections of plays for the Lecture Room. This method of reflection led me to my own premise that perhaps Barnum also knowingly used his exhibitions in the museum to educate his visitors on selected issues.

One final publication stands out amongst the group for its stunning visual qualities. The Kunhardt family (father and sons) wrote and produced the three-hour Discovery Channel documentary *P.T. Barnum: America's Greatest Showman*, and then published an accompanying illustrated biography (1995). The elder Kunhardt was a former managing editor for *Life* magazine, and the reader profits from his experience

through the rich layouts and large photo reproductions throughout the volume. The reproductions of advertisements and images from the American Museum proved to be infinitely useful. By examining these sources, I was somewhat able to put myself in the shoes of a visitor to the museum, and attempt to see for myself the role that the visual arts played in relation to other exhibitions.

PUBLICATIONS FROM BARNUM'S AMERICAN MUSEUM

Throughout the history of Barnum's American Museum, brochures, guidebooks, and various other souvenirs were sold alongside the exhibitions. These published supplements to the museum provided me with some of the most vital written evidence I needed to support my argument for the important role education played in the museum.

While there are accounts that millions of these guide books were sold to visitors, I was surprised to find they are extremely rare today. For the purposes of this study, I tracked down two museum guidebooks, three exhibition-specific pamphlets, and a narrative guide to the museum.

The earliest official guidebook (1850) I found is a catalogue that explores numerous exhibitions at the American Museum, and is organized geographically within the museum. Many small illustrations accompany the text and range in topic from animals to sculptures to reproductions of the rooms. Unfortunately, no author is credited. This guidebook was used to create a virtual reproduction of Barnum's first museum on the web at http://lostmuseum.cuny.edu, also an excellent resource for my research.

The next major catalogue I found was printed in 1863. Totaling 112 pages, this later guidebook is more than three times longer than the 1850 edition. A more specific account of each item in the exhibitions is made, including case numbers alongside the

descriptions. It is still organized by room, and the illustrations are largely the same, but it has been vastly expanded.

Unlike the catalogues that provide an overview of the entire museum, smaller pamphlets were printed that offer details about an individual exhibition or display. One pamphlet I have been able to examine was created for a tableau of Cerean sculpture (1852) entitled *Lord Byron and the Greeks; or, the Suliot Conspiracy*.

This "pamphlet" is in fact a small book of 38 pages. From the very start, it touches on the medium of the display by explaining to the reader "Cerean signifies 'made of wax'" (*Descriptive pamphlet of the celebrated gorgeous oriental tableau*, 1852, p. 5). Considerable detail is given regarding the historical circumstances of the tableau, as well as biographical accounts of the twelve figures depicted. An engraving of the exhibition is found at the beginning of the pamphlet, whereby each of the figures are numbered so as to correspond with their section in the text.

Perhaps the most unique printed item from Barnum's American Museum is the guidebook entitled *Sights and Wonders in New York; Including a Description of the Mysteries, Miracles, Marvels, Phenomena, Curiosities, and Nondescripts Contained in the Great Congress of Wonders, Barnum's Museum; Also, a Memoir of Barnum Himself, with a Description and Engraving of this Oriental Villa at Bridgeport, Conn., a Likeness and History of General Tom Thumb, his Reception by Queen Victoria, and the Principal Crowned Heads of Europe, etc., etc*. (1849). Here the reader is presented a narrative between fictional "Uncle Timothy Find-Out" and his well-behaved, orphaned nephews. The family travels to New York City where they visit "the museum under the control of Mr. Barnum" (p. 2). The boys (and the reader) are given interesting accounts of the many exhibitions, as well as a brief history lesson about museums.

WORKS THAT PROVIDE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The impetus for my study is specifically directed toward Barnum's American Museum, but it would be irresponsible of me to isolate this institution from its peers and from historical context. Some features of early American museums are examined in Chapter Three, with a focus on the place of education. Secondary sources play a primary role in this section of research, so I am indebted to the careful and complete examinations of museum history by authors such as Orosz, Sellers, and Dennett.

A critical look at the popular opinion that early museums were nothing more than either commercial sideshows or elitist institutions prompted Orosz's (1990) complex study of American museums in their developing years. He contends that both these assertions are false, and that museums from 1740 to 1870 "were direct products of the American democratic culture and developed in synchronization with the evolution of the wider cultural climate" (Orosz, 1990, p. 3).

Though no one has accused Barnum's American Museum of being elitist, the institution is commonly reduced to the other stereotype of being a popular sideshow. This volume by Orosz (1990), therefore, becomes especially relevant in my argument that educational value was to be found at Barnum's museums. Extensive references to Barnum's museums are included throughout.

Dennett (1997) takes a slightly different approach to museum history than does Orosz. While Orosz builds a chronological history of the major museums and their proprietors, Dennett is only interested in institutions that were popularly referred to as "dime museums." While there is some overlap between the volumes, there is more disparity in the choices of discussion.

One entire chapter of Dennett's (1997) *Weird and Wonderful* is devoted to P.T. Barnum and his American Museum, but the context provided by Dennett's discussion of

other dime museums is the most valuable aspect of her book. Taking a similar "cultural studies" approach to the period that Bluford Adams does in his work *E. Pluribus Barnum*, Dennett (1997) presents "what a dime museum was, how important it was to nineteenth-century Americans, and how this institution, which lasted little more than half a century, affected the twentieth-century amusement industry" (p. xiii).

One last contextual study that has been valuable to my research is Sellers' (1980) work *Mr. Peale's Museum: Charles Willson Peale and the First Popular Museum of Natural Science and Art*. Unlike Dennett and Orosz who included broad looks at the eighteenth and nineteenth century museum landscape, Sellers examines a single museum and its proprietor, Charles Willson Peale. There is a direct link between Peale and Barnum because much of Peale's collection made its way to Barnum's hands. Also, Peale has often been thought of as the first American museum educator, so I felt it would be important to have as much information about him as possible going into my own historical study of Barnum's educational efforts.

READINGS ON MUSEUM EDUCATION

One challenge I faced when sorting through the Barnum materials is that the concept of museum education, as we understand it in today's context, is a fairly recent phenomenon in museum history. It is important for me to acknowledge that while Barnum may not have had the same goals or vocabulary as contemporary museum educators, he may have been achieving some of the same results. One of my goals for this study was to identify any procedures or programs that occurred at the American Museum that further aided the visitor in understanding the exhibitions, the museum at large, or their society in a new way. To help me with this task, I consulted modern texts

on museum education and used that information to look at Barnum's museum in a new light.

The first chapter of *From Knowledge to Narrative* (1997) examines the issue of "scholarship versus popularization" (Roberts, 1997, p. 13), a conflict that spans museum history from Barnum's age to the present day. Roberts shows how the conflict emerged, who were on the opposing sides, and how the definition of education has continued to shift over time. This is a very useful text for framing my discussion of Barnum in terms of edutainment and the changing opinions museum professionals have held regarding the goals for museums.

Some of the questions addressed in Buffington's (2007) chapter, "Six Themes in the History of Art Museum Education," concern where museum education originated, what forms it took, what institutions participated in its proliferation, and what the role of theory and research has been in the history of art museum education. There are excellent references to specific museum contributions in this text, and they provided contextual markers for my own research with Barnum's methods and policies.

While both Charles Willson Peale's collection and Moses Kimball's Boston Museum are referenced in the chapter, Barnum's American Museum was excluded. I speculate this is due to the lack of published information on the educational contributions that Barnum's museum made in museum history—an oversight that initiated and motivated my research here.

In *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, Falk and Dierking (2000) presented their theories of "free-choice learning" and the "contextual model of learning." I think it is important to frame my discussion of Barnum's efforts (implied or explicit) in museum education in relation to educational

theory, and these well-established researchers in the field provided me with some of the language that enabled me to accomplish this.

While Lord's (2007) *The Manual of Museum Learning* is intended as an instructional manual for contemporary museum practitioners, I see some value in referencing it in this historical study because of its broad definition of "museum learning." Lord acknowledges "many visitors come to our museums with no conscious intent to learn" (p. xv) Certainly this is a characteristic shared with nineteenth-century museum visitors, and yet the result of their visits cannot be limited by their own intentions.

The book is divided into three sections, exploring the why, who, and how of museum learning. The first two sections in particular suggest contexts that parallel those in my research.

READINGS ABOUT USING A HISTORICAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Having selected a research topic that involves a historical figure and the circumstances of early museums, it was important that I understood the current trends in historical research. Works by Bolin (1995), Efland (1995), and McDowell (2002) helped me be cognizant of the process and complications that historical research may incur.

Focusing on the choices that the historian must make, Bolin (1995) highlights contemporary issues related to historical research in the field of art education in his chapter on methodology in Smith's edited volume *Art Education Historical Methodology: An Insider's Guide to Doing and Using*. The importance of creating an effective argument, rather than just a repetition of facts and events has guided me in my research on P.T. Barnum.

I realized early in my research that by selecting such a high profile figure, I was going to find far more information than was relevant for my study. Bolin's chapter prompted me to be very selective when gathering source material so as not to be overwhelmed with irrelevant (to my study) information on Barnum's careers as a politician and a circus man.

Another important figure in the field of art education, Arthur Efland (1995) used examples from his own publications to build his case for the differences between factual statements and interpretations, primary versus secondary resources, and some of the fallacies in the history of the field. The explanations of presentism, isolationism, and iconoclasm at the end of the chapter were essential for me to understand before undertaking the role of an interpretive historian.

Unlike my previous two sources, McDowell (2002) is not from the field of art education, but did provide me with the guidance of a historical researcher. I found the introduction of *Historical Research: A Guide* on the nature and value of history itself to be revealing as well as inspirational. Placing a great deal of emphasis on the prejudices and preoccupations of the researcher, McDowell (2002) discusses the "interrelationships between factual evidence and the interpretation of this evidence by historians" (p. 4). This work made me very aware of myself in the research process, which I think improved my skills as a historical researcher.

CONCLUSION

As evidenced in this brief look at some of the sources I consulted for my study, there is a wide range of applicable literature. I reference these works and others in greater detail in the following chapters. Chapter Three is focused specifically on the history of early museums in America. Chapter Four looks solely at Barnum's American Museum and his collections. Finally, Chapter Five examines the educational offerings of Barnum's American Museum by pairing his policies (explicit and implied) with contemporary museum education theories.

Chapter 3: *The Emergence of Early American Museums and their Educational Philosophies*

Barnum's American Museum and the educational offerings within, were both influenced by, and a response to, the relatively new history of museums in America. Predecessors such as Pierre Eugene Du Simitiere, Charles Willson Peale, Gardiner Baker, the New York Historical Society, and others had forged paths in exhibitions and education to which the nineteenth-century public was offered varying levels of access. To understand Barnum and the choices he made at the American Museum, it is necessary to consider this historical context.

This chapter explores the birth of the museum movement in America, and addresses the philosophies of several emerging museums. The emphasis remains on education in order to make the information most relevant to my study of education in Barnum's American Museum. This also helps to narrow the scope of material presented here, since it is necessary to span over one hundred years of history in one chapter, covering a topic about which several excellent books have already been written.

While my goal is to present an accurate description of eighteenth and nineteenth century museums and their visitors, it is important to note that I am looking at this topic two to three hundred years after the fact. I am conscious of this as I try to present a report that includes multiple voices while avoiding presentism and generalizations.

CRITICISM OF EARLY AMERICAN MUSEUMS

Some of the first museum historians, including George Brown Goode, John Cotton Dana, Theodore Low, and Francis Henry Taylor, "all agreed that nothing of consequence had occurred in the pre-1870 history of American museums, that for all practical purposes, museum history had begun in 1870" (Orosz, 1990, p. 238). This

marker in time was an important turning point, to be sure, as both the American Museum of Natural History and the Metropolitan Museum of Art were founded at this time. There was, however, a strong degree of interest in museum stewardship prior to the initiation of these more famous and modern institutions. This included not only P.T. Barnum's American Museum, but also museums run by the Peale family, the New York Historical Society, The Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, and others. Thankfully for these early pioneers, modern day historians have looked beyond the words of Goode, Dana, Low, and Taylor.

Two other criticisms of early museums were prevalent throughout the twentieth century. In *Curators and Culture: The Museum Movement in America, 1740-1870*, Joel Orosz calls these the professional criticism and the democratic criticism. In describing these perspectives Orosz (1990) states: "The professional criticism, then, holds that pre-1870 American museums consisted of spectacular or bizarre objects with no scientific or educational value; in short, they were sideshows aimed at public gratification" (p. 2). In contrast, "The democratic criticism, then, holds that the pre-1870 museums developed from an alien, antiegalitarian background antithetical to the egalitarian culture of America, that is to say, that museums are, and always have been, run by the elite for the elite" (Orosz, 1990, p. 2). In *Curators and Culture*, Orosz works to create a more balanced picture of the history of museums in the United States, and contends that neither of these criticisms are fair.

My research has revealed that Barnum was especially susceptible to the professional criticism, and that many historians maintain the belief that, "he was exploiting the gullibility of the masses to build a center of popular entertainment" (Orosz, 1990, p. 169). In Chapter Five I challenge these sentiments by building a case for the

educational components of the American Museum. This will follow my description of Barnum's life and his museum in Chapter Four.

THE FIRST MUSEUMS IN AMERICA

More than ten museums with a fixed address, and dozens of transient dime museums, were established in the United States prior to the 1870 divide of the "modern museum." The first museums on record are actually older than the United States, and are the products of individual collectors. Dennett (1997) writes, "Patriotism and a sense of democracy, coupled with the hope of disseminating knowledge and preserving New World culture, caused many eighteenth-century Americans who had amassed collections of books and objects to invite the public to view their assemblages, sometimes for a small fee" (p. 1).

These early collections were often known as "cabinets of wonders and curiosities," but "'Curious,' it should be noted, signified an object of intellectual interest, and is not to be taken in its present, often pejorative sense" (Sellers, 1978, p. 26). The private cabinets, considered the "European model of a museum" (Orosz, 1990, p. 25), were soon replaced by a more public offering, considered to be in spirit with the American style of freedom and equal opportunities.

Maintaining a sustainable income was another cause for collectors to open their cabinets to the public. Pierre Eugene De Simitiere was one such collector who is remembered today for having opened the first post-revolutionary museum in America. In 1782, "Du Simitiere announced his intention of allowing the public to view his Philadelphia collection of scientific and natural history objects for an admission charge of 50 cents" (Dennett, 1997, p. 10). The main focus of the collection was on American

artifacts, and it was in fact called "American Museum"–a name that is oft repeated over the next hundred years (by Barnum as well).

Before engaging in a career as a museum proprietor, Du Simitiere was known as a painter and a historian. He moved to Philadelphia from Geneva, Switzerland in 1774 after travelling extensively through the Caribbean Islands and much of North America. It was during these travels that he began collecting natural history specimens and artifacts with the hopes to one day publish a historical document. Though his written work was never realized due to lack of funds, these specimens and artifacts served as the backbone of his museum collection.

Very little is known about the museum itself, as "there are no records of attendance or special events, and only sketchy accession records" (Orosz, 1990, p. 38). A broadside printed in June 1782 explains that the museum houses both natural and artificial curiosities. These included marine productions, land productions, fossils, petrifications, botany, antiquities, weapons, and paintings. If there was an educational component to the experience, Du Simitiere may have subscribed to the belief that simply exposing the public to these phenomena, presented in a logical order, would be beneficial to people's understanding of the world, a theory that was widely embraced at the time. There is no mention of programs such as tours, lectures, or other events.

Although advertisements were placed in local newspapers to attract members of the "middling class," the price was still prohibitive to many citizens of Philadelphia. Visitors to Du Simitiere's museum, therefore, tended to be from the upper class, and often-included dignitaries from Europe. One first hand account by the Marquis De Chastellux tells us it "was rather small and rather paltry [but] very renowned in America because it had no rival there" (Orosz, 1990, p. 35).

Unfortunately for De Simitiere, ticket sales were sparse and he was never able to make enough money to support himself. He died penniless in 1784, just two years after opening the museum. The contents of his collection were sold at auction in thirty-six large lots (Orosz, 1990, p. 40).

EDUCATION IN EARLY MUSEUM HISTORY

Following the closure of Du Simitiere's American Museum several other collections opened to the public in Philadelphia, New York City, and Boston. Rather than look at these chronologically, something that has already been nicely laid out by Orosz in *Curators and Culture*, I compare and contrast these budding institutions according to their educational philosophies. It is important to note that many of these so-called philosophies have been ascribed to the museums after the fact.

Early tools of museum education include brochures, pamphlets, and catalogues. These written accounts of the collections, in combination with advertisements for the institutions, essays and diaries by proprietors, and in some rare cases, visitor reports tucked away in correspondence or journals, provide researchers with an incomplete picture of what the actual educational efforts by curators and proprietors may have been. Although very few tours or programs are described in the resources that remain, we cannot rule out the possibility that men who were passionate about their collections may have talked about them to groups in the galleries. The use of lecture halls for presentations are much more commonly noted, perhaps partly because the advertisements for these events were posted in newspapers, to which we still have access today.

Aside from the creation of specific programs, tours, or text, "They [museum proprietors] felt that the visitor to the museum could not help but learn from the objects displayed, for all men had an innate desire to learn, and the artifacts imparted knowledge

in an enjoyable fashion" (Orosz, 1990, p. 29). The very definition of education, therefore, broadens considerably when we consider it in the context of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

A description of a collection catalogue from the Wadsworth Atheneum (c. 1844) is included in *Curators and Culture*:

> The catalogue of the collection was a twenty-eight-page pamphlet offering lengthy descriptions of works on exhibit. Since the majority of these were American historical canvases, the descriptions tended to emphasize history rather than aesthetics. Still, it was obviously intended to be a scholarly document, one which would enhance the understanding of people of states. It was simply too sophisticated to be useful for popular education. (Orosz, 1990, p. 154)

Popular Education

Private collections that were shared through social and political connections had been the protocol for so long that many early museum proprietors did not foresee how popular their collections would be with the general public:

> Necessity drove them to open their museums to the public, but once they had taken this step, the proprietors came to realize that their museums could be socially useful. The "lower orders"—hired hands, menial laborers, merchant sailors, and the like—sought entertainment and needed education. The museum could be used to give both. (Orosz, 1990, p. 26)

At the turn of the nineteenth century, an emerging middle class began to embrace the idea of visiting museums, partly due to the lack of other readily available wholesome activities and an increase in "free time" away from work, due to the industrial revolution. With greater discretionary time, "the museum provided an alternative to sinful pastimes, for it offered entertainment that was innocent and, above all, rational" (Orosz, 1990, p. 28). While this had the benefit of an increase in ticket sales, museum proprietors were placed in a new position opening their doors to all citizens, including men, women *and* children. Women and children had not always been so welcome:

> During the two decades from 1800 to 1820, Peale and his sons overcame their doubts about the middle classes and moved toward a conception of popular education that emphasized the presentation of supposedly objective facts to the people so that they could make their own decisions. For those who would not or could not learn, the museum would at least provide 'rational amusement' that would reduce the need for frivolous pleasure or vices. (Orosz, 1990, p. 81)

Popular education, as discussed by Charles Willson Peale in reference to his Philadelphia museum, grew out of ideals of the Enlightenment, a socio-political movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: "The free labor ideology, most powerful in the North, but influential all over the nation, emphasized popular education so that each man may have every advantage in his attempt to rise in life" (Orosz, 1990, p. 8). Museums that embraced popular education believed they were contributing to social progress, and improving society by making their collections available to the public at large. Upon closer inspection, however, not all these institutions were quite so easily accessible, and therefore catered to a more restricted public audience.

Peale – Philadelphia

Perhaps one of the most well remembered early museum proprietors is Charles Willson Peale. According to Kulik (1992), "For museum professionals, in particular, Peale seems to have faced peculiarly modern dilemmas. His long struggle for financial support, his efforts to create a museum that was both entertaining and scholarly, and his attempts to use it self-consciously as an instrument of democracy, compel us to him" (p. 11). Additionally, Peale had a longstanding commitment to popular education as it related to improving society and contributing to democracy. As Orosz (1990) points out: "The museum's purpose was two-fold: education and entertainment. But as Peale clearly stated, the content of this education was to be moralistic in tone" (p. 82).

Peale was already well known as an artist and a scientist prior to founding the Philadelphia Museum in America's new capital in 1786. Several of his portraiture clients

were influential politicians, including George Washington and Benjamin Franklin: "To Peale, America was a nation blessed with gifts of freedom and order; the only enemy capable of threatening those blessings was ignorance" (Orosz, 1990, p. 55). To guard against this ignorance, Peale felt that the government should step in and nationalize his museum, thereby giving him lifelong support for building and maintaining a strong collection, while continuing to provide citizens with a publicly available education. Peale's connections in government were helpful, yet they did not allow him to realize his goal of nationalizing his museum.

The collection itself consisted of his own paintings, both live and dead animals (preserved by taxidermy or displayed as skeletons), fossils, shells, and anthropological items from Native American people, as well as artifacts from cultures abroad. Peale took great joy in collecting specimens himself, but also continually solicited donations from travelers and patrons. His methods of exhibition were achieved through trial and error, including his skills as a taxidermist. Most of the animals were displayed in cases with hand-painted backdrops that reflected the natural habitats of the species.

One item Peale is especially famous for recovering and displaying is the bones of a Mastodon. The gigantic relic was recovered from a farm in New York by a team of men under Peale's employ, and transferred back to Philadelphia for assembly and duplication. Any missing parts were reconstructed to give the illusion of the whole beast. The skeleton was in such wide demand that a duplicate was sent abroad to London for a number of years.

While Peale was already a vocal supporter of popular education when his museum opened in 1786, his concept of what form education might take continued to evolve over the next forty years: "This notion of the museum-as-school, fully developed in Peale's mind by 1800, motivated his museum endeavors for the rest of his life" (Orosz, 1990, p.

55). While the idea of teaching the public motivated Peale, his reasons for doing so would not be held in high regard today: "Peale, in 1802, equated education with a paternalistic urge to mold the middle classes into the form of the respectability" (Orosz, 1990, p. 82). Discussing Peale's regard toward education, Roberts (1997) writes,

> To Peale, instead of didactic moralizing, popular education should be concerned with 'the presentation of supposedly objective facts to the people so that they could make their own decisions. For those who would not or could not learn, the museum would at least provide 'rational amusement' that would reduce the need for frivolous pleasure or vices. The museum would thus be simultaneously a school in which the sovereign people could learn to make wise choices and a place of wholesome diversion for the thoughtless. (p. 25)

To aid in the visitor's education, several attempts at written catalogues were published, with varying intentions and audiences. Initially, Peale was interested in aligning a guide directly with his exhibition, while providing scientific information on each specimen:

> In these books, now unhappily lost, the classes and orders of the Linnaean system were given ample space for specific entries. Each had its number, to be keyed to a Museum label. The numbering would be revised several times, as Peale was forced to recognize the real extent of his undertaking. (Seller, 1979, p. 36)

A more in-depth catalogue was later developed that "was to be published in parts, by subscription, with the whole eventually becoming an octavo volume of from 300 to 500 pages, with the subscribers' names listed as Patrons of Science" (Seller, 1979, p. 83). This *Scientific and Descriptive Catalogue* was published in both English and French, but not enough financial support was garnered to publish more than one volume in the costly set.

The last written guide created by Charles Willson Peale in 1805-1806 was called "A Walk With a Friend Through the Philadelphia Museum." According to Peale, he wanted to "describe everything as he would to a friend strolling at his side" (Sellers,

1979, p. 199). His children, now heavily involved in the family business, did not appreciate this new approach: "Rubens, backed by Rembrandt, called a halt. This was entirely too expensive a substitute for their eight-page *Guide to the Philadelphia Museum,* first issued from the Museum Press in 1804 and reprinted as needed thereafter to be given out to every ticket purchaser" (Sellers, 1979, p. 200).

Rubens, Rembrandt, and Titian Peale continued to publish catalogues for the museums in Baltimore, New York, and Philadelphia after Charles Willson retired. While these catalogues remained largely scientific or historical descriptions of the works, Titian did have one unique manual: "In 1831, to encourage others, he published the *Circular of the Philadelphia Museum: Containing Directions for the Preservation and Preparation of Objects of Natural History*, with twenty-nine pages and five engraved plates, a concise little manual for collectors" (Sellers, 1979, p. 262).

Charles Willson Peale also turned to publishing to help diffuse knowledge outside the museum walls. In 1824, Peale published a journal aimed at the middle class, to "popularize the knowledge obtainable at the museum" called *the Philadelphia Museum, or Register of Natural History and the Arts* (Orosz, 1990, p. 114). It was also hoped that the journal would increase visitation to the museum for further knowledge, though it is doubtful this was successful, as only one issue was published.

By 1820 Peale recognized it would be necessary to institute more active education, as he understood "that it was not enough simply to let people read labels or a guidebook" (Orosz, 1990, p. 112). One "active measure" Peale experimented with was hiring a faculty of four professors. Lectures were held in the lower room of the State-house with the high hopes that by presenting information more extensively through these programs, they would "improve and benefit society" (Orosz, 1990, p. 113). The lecture series was not well attended, however, and the program was eventually abandoned.

The first recorded museum-school partnership in America began with Peale in 1821. Free admission was offered to "'Teachers of School, when accompanied by their class of schollars [*sic*] who pay 12 ½ cents each'" (Orosz, 1990, p. 113). Unfortunately, we don't know what the visit entailed for these students once they were admitted at this discounted price. Peale was known to give private tours for friends and dignitaries, but nothing about group tours has emerged in my research.

The museum business was a family affair for Charles Willson Peale. Not only did his children help by collecting specimens, caring for animals, and painting exhibition cases, two of Peale's sons (Rembrandt and Rubens) went on to open museums in New York and Baltimore, in addition to the original collection in Philadelphia they maintained after their father's retirement. While each museum was unique, they all grew from the elder Peale's vision of popular education made accessible to the masses.

A challenge all three locations struggled to address was the increasing need to balance entertainment with education: "Peale believed that education was crucial to happiness, but he knew from observation that many refused to learn because the process of learning was often tedious. By injecting a leavening of entertainment into the business of learning, Peale hoped to make people enjoy it" (Orosz, 1990, p. 84). Criticism of the New York and Baltimore museums maintain that a balance was not met, and that the Peale children had exploited their collections for the sake of pure entertainment.

Indeed, a direct line is drawn between the Peale museums and P.T. Barnum at this point for two reasons. First, "P.T. Barnum was heir to the Peales, acquiring the contents of Rubens Peale's New York museum in 1842, leasing the Baltimore museum in 1845 and 1846, and purchasing a portion of the contents of the Philadelphia museum in 1850" (Kohlstedt, 1992, p. 33). Second, critics contend that supporting entertainment caused museums to "embrace a crass commercialism, the logical extension of which was P.T.

Barnum" (Kulik, 1992, p. 12). The negative connotations to this statement, aside from the fact that historians are perpetuating misinformation about Barnum and his efforts in the museum industry, are reasons for me to pursue my topic and present a counter argument that Barnum and his museum did possess educational value.

The New-York Historical Society

The New York Historical Society endured over 60 years as a largely elitist society before taking an interest in popular education. Orosz (1990) maintains that "by 1870, the society had, for the most part, embraced the synthesis of popular education and scholarly support that defined the modern American Museum" (p. 212). Under the leadership of Luther Bradish, the Society was transformed from a private club to a much more public-friendly institution:

> In 1852, when the society moved to its new home at the corner of Second Avenue and Eleventh Street, one impediment was at least partially removed, and the hours of the library and museum were extended from six hours per day to thirteen; henceforth, they would be open from 9:00 A.M. to 10:00 P.M. A visitor still needed to secure a ticket from a society member, but now, for the first time, the institution was open when a working person could visit it. (Orosz, 1990, p. 214)

During the period of 1853-1866, the Society grew, gaining numerous strong acquisitions in fine arts and archaeology. The most important acquisition at this time was the collection of original watercolors by John James Audubon for *The Birds of America*, purchased for $4,000 in 1862. The strengths of the art collection inspired the members of the Society's art committee to be "enthusiastic supporters of the idea of promoting the aesthetic education of the public through free, perpetual exhibitions" (Orosz, 1990, p. 216). A lack of funds to provide a gallery space prevented this from materializing, but arguments that highlighted the educational value of the proposal were made numerous times over the next several years.

Brandish continued to lead the Society towards an appreciation for popular education until his death in 1863. At this time, "Frederic De Peyster ably picked up Brandish's torch and continued his predecessor's liberal programs" (Orosz, 1990, p. 218). In discussing museums, he believed:

> The museum must conduct itself so that it will be "highly appreciated by students of history," indeed, so that it would be indispensable "to the student in this field of historical research." The museum, however, must be far more than a research institution. As De Peyster put it, "The museum in its amplitude, will embrace a wider and more extensive field." The wider field was, as the title suggested, social progress.
>
> Social progress could be promoted by the museum's second great function, popular education. The museum could be an efficient educator, and that was crucial, for: 'Our country, more than any other in the world, is dependant upon the virtue of the people; and their virtue is largely dependent upon their intelligence and education; and these depend upon the intellectual stimulus which they receive.' (Orosz, 1990, p. 219)

Though De Peyster espoused these beliefs, the Society was one based on committees and a large membership that did not allow rapid change. When the new museum building finally did open next to Central Park in 1857, it was still largely restrictive, and did not allow easy access for the public to visit the collections.

William Maclure – The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia

Another institution working to achieve a social balance in their mission was the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. Accordingly, Orosz (1990) states: "On the one hand, they did their best to serve the needs of serious scientific investigators; on the other, they sought to provide education in natural history to the general public" (p. 119).

William Maclure, president of the academy from 1817-1840, was a strong proponent of popular education. Specifically, he believed in the Pestalozzian system of popular education, stressing concrete experiences over those that were more theoretical in

nature. This meant that a careful examination of an authentic artifact would provide a superior education to a representation, a book, or a description. Maclure wanted to use the Academy and their collection to extend this opportunity for authentic experiences:

> Maclure was adamant that the advantages of the Pestalozzian system should be "applied to the great bulk of mankind; namely, the productive, labouring and useful classes." The Pestalozzian system, aided by museums, could provide an education that would train everyone in society to discharge their duties. (Orosz, 1990, p. 121)

Maclure was not alone at the Academy in his beliefs regarding popular education, and in fact several other members had been employed as lecturers at Peale's Museum. Isaac Lea, another member, believed "the investigation of nature cannot fail to be valuable. It engages all of our intellectual Faculties to the greatest extent, and by its ardent pursuit, the general stock of useful information is increased" (Orosz, 1990, p. 121). The greatest hurdle that prevented these members from sharing their collection with the public, and engaging them in authentic experiences, was the lack of a proper building to display their collections. Complicating this was the fact that the Academy was in debt, and unable to acquire such a space.

In 1828, after nearly three years, a space with locked cabinets was finally obtained. The galleries were opened "two half days of every week 'for the gratuitous admission of citizens and strangers,' but qualified this by adding that only such persons who could produce tickets of admission signed by academy members could gain entry" (Orosz, 1990, p. 122). Although this arrangement was still somewhat restrictive, it was the farthest any private society had gone in offering the public a free viewing of their collections. Even Peale charged an entrance fee of fifty cents.

It took another thirty years for the Academy to reconfirm their commitment as an educational institution through printed materials intended for the general public. The

academy published, "for the first time, a booklet to serve as a guide to the collection…in 1862. The booklet reveals that the academy was attempting to make its exhibits as intelligible as possible to the average visitor….The handbook also advised the public that the museum was an educational tool for their benefit" (Orosz, 1990, p. 190).

Maclure held high hopes that "the inequalities of the old society could and should be swept way by educating the young, so that they could form a new social order" (Orosz, 1990, p. 23). To some extent, this statement parallels the moralizing beliefs that Charles Willson Peale and Frederic De Peyster held for their institutions. Although each proprietor was working under different circumstances, with altogether different collections, it is interesting to note that the driving forces behind these three institutions was a favorable view towards popular education and the effects it could have on society.

Useful Education: Baker

The first museum to experiment with free admission for the public also set out with the intent to provide a useful education to the American public. To the Tammany Society, a patriotic group of men who established their American Museum in 1790, a useful education was one that taught visitors about America and its history, promoted patriotism, induced a love for liberty and independence, and could lead society to civic improvement. In fact, under the leadership of John Pintard and Gardiner Baker, the society initially limited their collection to American artifacts:

> The promotion of patriotism among the people was, in Baker's opinion, of the greatest public utility. He told Pintard, 'The pleasure that [I] feel in being the promoter of this very usefull [*sic*] institution, is the most charming Compensation that the active patriot can receive for public services.' Baker believed that in a new nation, which needed unifying factors for its very survival, the promotion of a public museum was a patriotic measure, for it united Americans taking pride in American natural history and American genius. (Orosz, 1990, p. 65)

Pintard and Baker looked to Peale's museum in Philadelphia for suggestions on exhibition practices and advertising, so it may not be surprising then that they called their museum by the same name, "The American Museum." The museum went through many changes between 1790 and 1798, at which time Baker passed away and the collection was sold to Edward Savage.

In 1795 Baker took on full responsibility for the museum, breaking amicably from the Tammany Society. Admission prices were added and amended several times in an attempt to make the museum profitable for its proprietor. Baker also became interested in building a menagerie, "New York's first permanent animal exhibitions; it included a mountain lion, raccoons, groundhogs, birds, and snakes" (Dennett, 1997, pp. 15-16). In diversifying the collection there was criticism that Baker was abandoning the scholarly mission that the Tammany Society had intended for the museum. Orosz (1990) disagrees with this:

> Baker had tried to maintain a certain intellectual tone; for instance, in one advertisement he had boasted: "The Library consists of upwards of 500 volumes, most of which respect the history of the country . . . . it contains the best history of our country that is collected together. The Proprietor, in order to make this Library really useful to his country requests and privileges every person, who is 21 years of age and upwards, without any expense, to resort to it everyday and read any of the books . . . (for this purpose a room is set apart particularly having no connection with the museum). (p. 62)

Amusement Without Education

Not all institutions contemporary with Peale, Tammany, and the New York Historical Society were interested in education. Edward Savage purchased the collection of the American Museum in New York after Gardiner Baker died of yellow fever: "Savage, in his City Museum at 80 Greenwich Street, never pretended to be running a school or a scientific institution. It was frankly a diversion for anyone with a quarter"

(Orosz, 1990, p. 74). It is argued by Orosz (1990) that "this was precisely what the emergent middle classes sought in a museum—a place respectable enough to visit openly but one which dispensed diversions in generous quantities" (p. 74).

Though they would often feature the same types of artifacts and curiosities with museums, the travelling Dime Museums of the nineteenth century were not considered to be as respectable or educational: "What learning did in fact take place was almost accidental, for the dime museums were established as family recreation centers, not as temples for learning" (Dennett, 1997, p. 6).

Didactic Education: Scudder

The City Museum, under the ownership of Edward Savage, was to change hands once more in 1809, when it was purchased by naturalist John Scudder. Savage had hired Scudder as an exhibition curator, but Scudder "was disappointed with his boss's apparent lack of interest in the collection" (Dennett, 1997, p. 17). After spending several years travelling as a seaman, collecting and saving, Scudder bought the collection and moved it to 21 Chatham Street, calling it "The New American Museum."

The years under Scudder's ownership brought about major changes to the New American Museum. Education was a high priority for Scudder, "giving the people what he felt they needed. In this sense, he was firmly in line with the Didactic Enlightenment" (Orosz, 1990, p. 75).

Unlike useful education with its focus on patriotism, or popular education with its social agendas, didactic education was concerned with teaching the public proper modes of behavior. The goal was not to raise the lower and middle classes up through art and education, but to prepare the middle classes for their new position of authority following the events of the American and French revolutions.

Scudder educated his visitors through lectures illustrated by specimens from his collection. One visitor commented in the newspaper *Commercial Advisor:* "Parents will find this Museum an instructive school to teach their Children to behold and admire the marvelous works of creation" (Orosz, 1990, p. 75).

Scudder passed away in 1821 after ongoing exposure to poisonous taxidermy chemicals. John Scudder Jr. ran the museum for a while after his father's death, but the collection was eventually put up for sale and later purchased by P.T. Barnum. This examination of Barnum's American Museum was made possible by this transaction, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Five.

CONCLUSION

With so many changes to American society, including the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and the emergence of a larger and stronger middle class, it is no wonder museums were constantly shifting their philosophies of education towards the public. Though multiple institutions used the same tools (catalogues, lectures, rational exhibition methods, etc.), some distinctly different motives for public outreach are seen.

In this chapter I briefly outlined institutions and proprietors that approached education as *popular*, *useful*, or *didactic*. Each example provides us with a context for how museums and museum education emerged in America prior to the establishment of P.T. Barnum's American Museum. In the chapter that follows, I examine Barnum's life and his museum practices in greater detail.

Chapter 4: *Barnum: The Man and His Museum*

P.T. Barnum's life spanned the nineteenth century, during which he led a dynamic and entrepreneurial life. While my study focuses on education at Barnum's American Museum, one of his most passionate projects, this was by no means the only career aspiration he entertained. During this chapter I give a brief overview of Barnum's life, followed by an in-depth description of his American Museum. For more complete biographical information on Barnum in general, I invite readers to read Saxon (1989), Kunhardt et al. (1995), and Harris (1973).

THE BIRTH OF BARNUM AND CHILDHOOD IN BETHEL

On July 5, 1810, Phineas Taylor Barnum was born in Danbury, Connecticut. "Tale," as he was known as a child, "just missed making his first appearance on his country's 34th Independence Day and had to settle for July 5 instead. Typically, he always celebrated this mistake in timing by claiming he had planned it that way; he was just giving people a chance to settle down after the 1810 festivities so they could better relish his coming" (Kunhardt et al, 1995, p. 4). The new country was in the midst of a transportation and communications revolution, and Barnum was to grow up during the Age of Jackson (Whalen, 2000, p. viii).

Barnum started school at age six. He tells readers in his first autobiography that, "My father was a tailor, a farmer, and sometimes a tavern-keeper; so I was often kept out of school, and never had any 'advantages' except at the common district school, and one summer at the 'Academy' in Danbury, a distance of three miles, which I marched and countermarched six times per week" (Barnum, 1854, p.13). Barnum dropped out of school at age 12, and never returned to the classroom for any sort of formal schooling, but instead lived a life of constant curiosity and discovery. His opinions of school may

be rooted to his memories of his old schoolmaster, "a kind of being to make the children tremble" (Barnum, 1854, p. 13).

Story-telling, jokes, and harmless huckersting were a part of Barnum's life from the start. His own family perpetuated a prank for the young man that lasted several years, and became part of the tales told and retold time again by Barnum, his friends, and later his biographers. The story starts with Barnum's maternal grandfather and namesake, Phineas Taylor: "Uncle Phin, as he was known to everybody, was a cunning, sharp rogue who always kept a jump ahead of the next man with his never-ending cascade of wit and practical jokes. . . [he] became the most important and long-lasting influence in the boy's life" (Kunhardt et al, 1995, p. 4). Kunhardt et al (1995) continues:

> Early on, as a young child, Taylor had been made a landowner when Uncle Phin had presented him with a tract of land called "Ivy Island." "My grandfather always spoke of me (in my presence) to the neighbors and to strangers as the richest child in town," wrote Barnum, "since I owned the whole of 'Ivy Island,' one of the most valuable farms in the state. My father and mother frequently reminded me of my wealth and hoped I would do something for the family when I attained my majority." Finally, at ten, he got to see what he owned. The "promised land," the "mines of silver and gold" he had dreamed of turned out to be worthless, snake-infested swampland. "The truth flashed upon me," Barnum remembered later. "I had been the laughing stock of the family and neighborhood for years. (p. 8)

With experiences like this, Barnum developed a healthy sense of humor, and was able to gracefully take a joke as well as dish it out. Critics of Barnum have suggested that these early influences "seemed to help compel him to bamboozle others" (Kunhardt et al, 1995, p. 9), but this is not the case. Barnum's meager beginnings, and ability to see humor in most situations, endeared him later in life to members of the middle class, even when he had far surpassed them in annual income. He may have lived in some of the most lavish mansions on the east coast, but the citizens of New York and Connecticut still felt he was one of them, due to his likable personality.

EARLY EMPLOYMENT

Barnum's first formal job came as an employee of his father's country store. He was still very young at this point, but Barnum learned the value of a dollar quickly and for the next several years he practiced the art of turning a profit by carefully balancing the prices of his goods such as fabrics, hats, provisions, and oysters. He had a good head for numbers, and greatly enjoyed this type of work over physically toiling on the farm, as many of his friends were obliged to do. It is interesting to note that Barnum was selective about work, even from an early age – he had decided by the time he was sixteen that,

> he was not temperamentally suited for a job at a fixed salary, that his very nature longed for speculative ventures in which he could sink or swim according to his own merit. He had concluded that any line of work was wrong for him 'unless it is of such a nature that my profits may be greatly enhanced by an increase of energy, perseverance, attention to business, tact, etc.' (Kunhardt et al, 1995, p. 13)

At age twelve, Barnum had begun selling lottery tickets out of his father's store. This continued for some time: "Approaching his 21st birthday, Barnum had become extremely successful as a lottery-ticket salesman. He had his own office and pretended to be the sole agent of Dt. Strickland, a fictitious name he thought added scale and believability to his operation" (Kunhardt et al, 1995, p. 11). According to Barnum, this was a time of many life lessons: "I had learned that I could make money rapidly and in large sums, whenever I set about it with a will, and I did not hesitate to expend it in various extravagances as freely as I gained it" (Barnum, 1855, p. 142).

FAMILY LIFE

Charity Hallett met young Taylor Barnum, as he was called during his teenage years, when she was eighteen years old, a full two years older than Barnum. He claims later in his autobiography that it was love at first sight, "the brief view that I had of this girl by candle-light had sent all sorts of agreeable sensations through my bosom"

(Barnum, 1855 p. 98). The pair married three years later in 1829 in a small ceremony in New York City, at the home of Charity's uncle. Barnum remained devoted to the love of his life and often would pun "without Charity I am nothing" (Saxon, 1989, p. 198).

During their long marriage, Charity and P.T. would have four daughters and live in many homes between New York and Connecticut. Although their income was not great in the early years of their marriage, Barnum had this to say: "My habits generally were not bad. Although constantly engaged in selling liquor to others, I probably never drank a pint of liquor, wine, or cordials, before I was twenty-two years of age. I always attended church regularly, and was never without a Bible in my trunk, which I took frequent occasion to read" (Barnum, 1855, p. 109).

BARNUM AS NEWSPAPER EDITOR

As a young adult, Barnum moved away from his Calvinist upbringing to embrace a more "cheerful Christianity." This put him in the minority in his community, however, and his views were not welcome when submitted for publication in the local Danbury newspaper. As retaliation, Barnum decided to start his own paper: "I accordingly announced that I should purchase a press and types, and would within a few weeks commence the publication of a weekly paper which should oppose all combinations against the liberties of our country. On the 19th of October, 1831, I issued the first number of 'The Herald of Freedom'" (Barnum, 1855, p. 138).

The Herald of Freedom was a weekly newspaper with a radical message of equal rights. He had a liberal audience and was often the main voice of each edition, thereby becoming quite famous throughout the community. Over the next three years as editor, Barnum was accused of libel and prosecuted three times. One time he spent two months in jail, but that experience itself was a unique circumstance due to his "growing power in

the community and the strong support of most of its people….From his newly papered and carpeted cell, Barnum kept right on editing his paper, as well a receiving friends….Upon his release, he was celebrated at a dinner held in the very Danbury courtroom where he had been convicted" (Kundhardt et al, 1995, p. 16). A festive parade accompanied him back home in triumph.

Whalen (2000) contends that these early career moves, though quite a different starting point than where he ended, were important to Barnum's later success:

> In all likelihood, then, his work as a newspaper editor reinforced and extended the lessons he had learned as a lottery agent. These early experiences are important because they reveal what Barnum understood *before* he exhibited his first curiosity: the unique benefits of large-scale capital investment; the necessity of mass advertising; the lucrative advantages of identifying himself with patriotic causes and popular tastes; and the way that an atmosphere of carnival merriment could overcome scandal and infamy. In a more modern sense, Barnum acted as a prototypical spin doctor, for he understood that the social meaning of any event (or crime) was not given from the start but could instead be created or manipulated through the emergent mass media. (p. xiii)

THE MOVE TO NEW YORK CITY

During the winter of 1834-35, Barnum and his young family moved to New York City. He had sold his interests in the country store, and separated from *The Herald of Freedom*. One of the major reasons for the move appears to be linked to a legislative vote that banned lotteries in 1834. While the lottery was not his main career aspiration, it was a significant boost to his income in Connecticut, and Barnum was restless to find new opportunities in the already bustling New York City.

This was not Barnum's first venture into the City, he had visited several times as a teen, and even lived there for under a year, working as a store-keep shortly before he met Charity. The other trips did not have the same urgency to make a living that Barnum now faced as he arrived without a job, but with a wife and child to feed. He spent several

pages in his autobiography describing the schemes that were available to immigrants of the city. If you had money to invest, there were inventions and medicinal pills to be sold, but without the initial capital to spend, Barnum had a hard time landing on his feet.

BARNUM'S FIRST ACTS AS A SHOWMAN

Although Barnum had not set out to live in New York with a particular profession in mind, after a few months of desperately seeking employment he "fell into the occupation" of a showman (Barnum 1873, p. 71). His first exhibition was Joice Heath, "a 161-year-old slave who had tended George Washington at his birth and was still alive to tell about it" (Kunhardt et al, 1995, p. 20). It is debated as to whether or not Barnum knew that Heath was a hoax, but regardless of this fact he set forth on a marketing campaign that sold out speaking engagements across the northeast. At each stop the elderly woman entertained audiences with anecdotes surrounding the childhood of the Founding Father, sang hymns, and answered questions from the audience.

Heath died on February 19, 1836, less than a year after Barnum had hired her for exhibition. At an autopsy, it was determined that her age could be no older than 80, instead of 161 as they had claimed: "All in all, it was not only an eccentric way for Barnum to have entered what would soon become his chosen profession, but an unfortunate one as well, for, like it or not, from that time on his name would be associated with humbug and not taken as seriously as it should have been" (Kunhardt et al, 1995, p. 23).

For the rest of the 1830s, Barnum experimented with various acts and venues as he learned the ins and outs of the travelling showman's world. His previous work in sales at the country store and as editor of a newspaper served him well when it came to promoting his acts and building excitement around his exhibitions. He was not always

happy in this line of work, however, and in 1838 while travelling with various exhibitions Barnum reflected, "I was thoroughly disgusted with the life of an itinerant showman; and though I felt that I could succeed in that line, I always regarded it, not as an end, but as a means to something better in due time" (Barnum, 1855, p. 207).

BARNUM AS MUSEUM PROPRIETOR

Something better was indeed just around the corner for Barnum, who was soon to acquire Scudder's American Museum in his new hometown of New York City. While the property itself had been on the decline since Scudder's death, Barnum remarked, "I saw, or believed I saw, that only energy, tact and liberality were needed to give it life and to put it on a profitable footing" (Barnum, 1855, p. 216). He was determined to purchase the museum, despite its condition and the fact he did not have the fifteen thousand dollars the owners were asking for it.

The events that transpired leading up to Barnum's purchase of the museum in 1841 are a testimony to Barnum's creativity and persistence. After receiving the support of Francis Olmsted, owner of the museum building, to provide him with credit based on recommendations from friends as well as the collateral of Ivy Island, Barnum was surprised to learn the directors of Peale's Museum Company had already moved to purchase the property at asking price, and had already put down a deposit. Barnum was not about to give up so easily:

> Astounded but not defeated, Barnum discovered that the directors of Peale's Museum Company were speculators. The museum had been founded by Rubens Peale in the 1820s, when the Peale family was active in several cities. But the Peales had been forced to sell out. The later owners intended to sell a large amount of stock in their new enterprise, pocket the profits, and abandon the collection. But they would be unable to pay for Scudder's until they had unloaded some of their shares on a gullible public. (Harris, 1973, p. 39)

Barnum enlisted the help of the press in spreading the word about the director's fraudulent intentions. In an effort to silence Barnum and stop the negative publicity, the directors offered him a job as manager of both the existing New York Peale Museum, and the new institution they were trying to purchase. By Barnum accepting their job offer, the directors assumed that all was well, and they were no longer in a hurry to pay the remaining fee for Scudder's by the December 26 deadline because they assumed they were the only interested party.

In the mean time, Barnum had made an arrangement with the owners of Scudder's to sell him the museum on December 27 for the reduced fee of only twelve thousand dollars should the directors fail to pay by December 26. The directors missed their deadline, and on the morning of December 27, 1841, Barnum's "first act as the new proprietor of the American Museum was to inform the startled directors of the rival company that he had placed their names on the free list of his establishment" (Saxon, 1989, p. 90).

From 1841 through 1868, P.T. Barnum became the leading museum proprietor in the United States. He actively sought techniques to build upon and improve his American Museum, and in some cases this meant acquiring entire other museums or their collections. For a complete listing of the multiple museum transactions, please refer to the timeline in Appendix A.

The Immense Establishment

Illustration 1: Barnum's American Museum

Barnum's newly purchased American Museum stood at the corner of Broadway and Ann street. Barnum's neighbors included Genin's hat shop, St. Paul's Church, and Matthew Brady's photography studio. Entrance fees were a quarter, and children got in for half the price. While Barnum's museum was closed on Sundays, he was still accessible to the working class, with extended opening hours throughout the week from sunrise to 10:00 p.m.

According to Adams (1997), "the museum was its own best advertisement. The showman decorated the roof and façade of his Ann Street Museum with flags, paintings, banners, an illuminated color wheel, a Drummond light, a brass band, and gas letters

spelling out his name" (p. 83). Barnum would often recount how he searched for the worst band he could find to play on his balcony, so it would drive people passing by *into* his Museum.

Once inside, visitors would encounter an exhibition space that was constantly expanding to accommodate exciting new acquisitions. By 1863, the Museum had grown to occupy four adjoining buildings and was six stories tall. Barnum filled the space as fast as it grew:

> In my long proprietorship I considerably more than doubled the permanent attractions and curiosities of the establishment. In 1842, I bought and added to my collection the entire contents of Peale's Museum; in 1850, I purchased the large Peale collection in Philadelphia; and year after year, I bought genuine curiosities, regardless of cost, wherever I could find them, in Europe or America. (Barnum, 1873, p. 119)

A printed circular letter from June 1850, states that Barnum was eager to make the museum-going experience available to the larger community (including women and children), and would take measures to ensure that proper behavior would be upheld:

> My whole aim and effort is to make my museums totally unobjectionable to the religious and moral community, and at the same time combine sufficient *amusement* with instruction to please all proper tastes and to train the mind of youth to reject as repugnant anything inconsistent with moral and refined tastes….No intoxicating beverages are allowed on my premises, and all improper characters, male or female, are excluded. (Saxon, 1983, p. 43)

Cultural historian Bluford Adams (1997) points out that "Barnum could legitimately claim a popular patronage-bigender, cross-class, multiethnic, and variously aged—at his American Museum….In decades that saw New York's neighborhoods—and the amusements that catered to them—splinter along the lines of class and ethnicity, everybody went to Barnum's" (p. 75).

At least two guidebooks (authors unknown) were produced to aid visitors as they explored Barnum's exhibitions. Adams (1997) notes that the museum's "plain-English

displays and guidebooks were accessible even to the barely literate" (p. 80). I've found the guidebooks to be useful for allowing me to imagine what a visit to Barnum's American Museum may have been like, even though the museum has been closed for more than a century.

The oldest guidebook that remains in archives today is *Barnum's American Museum Illustrated*. It was published in 1850, nine years after he purchased the museum. Another guidebook was published in 1863, titled: *Catalogue or Guide Book of Barnum's American Museum, New York, Containing Descriptions and Illustrations of the Various Wonders and Curiosities of this Immense Establishment, Which Have Been Collected During the Last Half Century from Every Corner of the Globe. It Also Contains Illustrations and Descriptions of Various Living Wonders, which Have Been from Time to Time Exhibited There*. It is from this work that I will attempt to describe what the museum contained, and how it was organized.

Cosmoramas

Illustration 2: The Cosmorama Department

The introduction to the 1863 guidebook touts that the "Cosmorama Department pictures forth every remarkable place and event" (p. 4). While this seems to be a grand and sweeping statement, in fact, 194 historical events and places are represented in this First Saloon (the exhibit halls in Barnum's museum are referred to as Saloons throughout each guidebook). Visitors would begin their visit in this picture hall, and it was assured that each visit would include new images "to insure interest and variety" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 7). Titles in the guidebook indicate a wide geographic span: "A view of Italy," "Church of Notre Dame, Paris," "Stockholm, the Capital of Sweden," "The Crystal Palace, in England," and "Turkish Camp in Asiatic Turkey." There are also titles that reference specific people and events such as "Country-house of the Great Painter, Reubens," "The Crucifixion," and "Eruption of Vesuvius in 1850."

What made the Cosmorama exhibition unique was the way the images were viewed: "through peepholes to allow for special effects of perspective and lighting" (Orosz, 1990, p. 183). Visitors are seen in illustration 2 at the perimeter of the saloon leaning up against the cases to peek through a lens that allowed them access to the exotic scenes.

Specimens from the Natural World

Hundreds of cases of taxidermy-treated animals were spread throughout the American Museum, many with realistically painted backdrops to indicate the natural environment of the species. This practice connects back to Charles Willson Peale's museum in Philadelphia, where the museum practitioner became an expert at mounting and displaying animals from across the globe for study. Barnum's animals were largely already in place when he purchased the museum, and it does not appear this was an area of collecting Barnum heavily pursued. Orosz (1990) seems to agree with this, and takes the educational results of Barnum's collection into account when he tells readers:

> In the 1840s, despite the cultural imperative toward professional science, Barnum made no pretense of collecting for the sake of science or even for the sake of education. He collected in order to amaze his visitors. Still, in some fields, and particularly in natural history, Barnum's gathering resulted in a collection, if not suitable for the advance of science, at least valuable for popular education. (p. 176)

The guidebook descriptions of these animals are organized by case number, and include a range of information. Most discuss where the animals lived, what they might eat, nicknames, and any distinguishing characteristics of the species. A typical guidebook entry for an animal is shown in this description for the Rail bird:

> YELLOW-BREASTED and BLUE-NECKED RAIL, of North America. The Rail is a delicious little fowl for eating, and affords considerable sport to the bird-hunter during the brief stay of four or five weeks, which it annually makes with us. In Virginia it is called the SORA, and in South Carolina the COOT. No one can detect the first moment of arrival; yet all at once, the reedy shores and grassy marshes of our large rivers swarm with them, thousands being found within the space of a few acres. These, when they do venture on wing, fly so feebly, and in such short, fluttering flights, among the reeds, as to render it surprising that they make their way, as they do, over immense tracts of country, and sometimes over hundreds of miles of ocean. On the first smart frost of Fall they disappear as suddenly as they came, and their sudden arrival and departure have led many to suppose that they concealed themselves in the mud during the Winter. The Rail subsists upon the seeds and blossoms of reeds, in the swamps and marshes, among which it conceals itself, and, being of similar color to the reeds, is scarcely ever discovered, except when it starts forth. It can only be hunted, to advantage, at high tide, and by the use of boats, for, at other times, the reeds so effectively conceal this bird, that although thousands will often be within a few feet of the hunter, he will see nor hear nothing. This bird has a peculiar habit, when irritated, of falling into a fit, during which it straightens itself out and for a few minutes becomes stiff and insensible, but afterwards recovers without any ill effect. (*Catalogue*, 1863, pp. 23-24)

Other entries are more anecdotal: "When rearing their young, [swans] are dangerous to all intruders, and boys 15 to 16 years of age have been killed by them on such occasions" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 13). Writing about the first elephant imported to the United States, known as "Old Bet," Barnum offered: "After being exhibited, for several years in various parts of the country, it was maliciously killed, in Rhode Island, in the year 1816. Old Bet had attracted great attention, and the common report that its hide was bullet-proof instigated a boy to conceal himself upon the roadside where the animal was to pass, and to fire upon it, in order to test the question" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 19).

In the Fifth Saloon, many larger mammals are presented together in cases for comparison. Special emphasis is placed on the extraordinarily large size of some of these specimens, including a rhinoceros and a black bear. The bear "was killed on Warwick

Mountain, State of New York, only sixty miles north of this city, in 1818, and was one of the largest bears which, up to that time, had ever been taken in the country, weighing more than 700 pounds" (*Catalogue,* 1863, p. 75). Exotic species such as kangaroos, monkeys, zebras, iguanas, and boa constrictors are found in this section. In other cases, the horns of a Reindeer, a moose, and an ox are displayed side by side.

The smallest of creatures, insects, were all exhibited together in the Sixth Saloon. A short statement in the guidebook references the collection: "Six cases containing a general variety of Bugs, Insects, &c., among which may be observed the Horned Beetle" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 92). There apparently was not much known about these tiny creatures, as this style of label is drastically different from the larger mammals discussed earlier in the guidebook.

Animals were not the only wonders of the "natural world" exhibited in Barnum's American Museum. In case No. 497, the visitor encountered, "An immense rock crystal—the best in the world—found in a silver mine 730 miles from the city of Mexico. It weighs 212 pounds, and is valued at two thousand dollars" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 60). It is interesting the monetary value was published in the guidebook. This was not common practice with the rest of the artifacts. Perhaps "rocks" were not popular with visitors, and a number was assigned in an effort to emphasize their value.

Shells, however, appear to have been very popular with visitors, and it is suggested in the guidebook that they will appeal not just to the Naturalist, but also to "all lovers of the curious and beautiful" (*Catalogue,* 1863, p. 64). A variety of shells are described and illustrated in the guidebook, with interesting tales about where they are found and how they received their names.

Also in the Sixth Saloon, the visitor encountered a piece of petrified wood. It was from Cape Fear River, North Carolina, and was exhibited alongside a case of minerals. The minerals case included lava, sulphur, asbestos, quartz crystals, and rock.

The "Grand Skeleton Chamber" in the Seventh Saloon claimed to contain "the most complete variety of Skeletons in America" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 98). A complete human skeleton was displayed alongside animals of all sizes, including an unusually large horse, which resembled an elephant.

Aquaria

Live aquatic creatures were added to the American Museum in 1857. Written accounts by visitors place an aquarium for whales and hippopotami in the basement, but this is not confirmed in any of Barnum's writings. Other glass aquaria were installed throughout the museum. Among the creatures displayed for visitors were speckled brook trout, pike, goldfish, catfish, yellow and white perch, black bass, striped bass, puffer, lobster, horseshoe crab, turtles, sea anemones, eel, angel fish, young sharks, and a seal.

Like the labels for the taxidermy-treated animals, these live creatures were given descriptions in the guidebook that included their points of origin, behavioral tendencies, nicknames, and food preferences.

Barnum procured a steady stream of salt water, allowing him to bring in more exotic fares:

> In the summer of 1861, I despatched a fishing smack and crew to the Island of Bermuda and its neighborhood, whence they brought scores of specimens of the beautiful 'angel fish,' and numerous other tropical fish of brilliant colors and unique forms. These fish were a great attraction to all classes, and especially to naturalists and others, who commended me for serving the ends of science as well as amusement. (Barnum, 1873, pp. 566-567)

The fish themselves were often in great danger once they were brought to the American Museum because proper care and feeding for such creatures was not always known. Many of them died within a short period of time, but according to Orosz (1990) they may have served a greater purpose:

> Beginning in the 1860s, he sponsored several expeditions to bring back unknown and unusual animals and fishes. These costly forays made the museum's collection, by the end of he decade, a fascinating trove for the layman and a valuable resource for the professional. The expeditions were not mounted merely to provide popular attractions, for Barnum could easily have found more spectacular offerings at a lower price. They had a more important purpose: the promotion of education and science. (p. 224)

The greatest logistical challenge Barnum faced in his aquaria was with the capture and display of his "white whales." As was the case with some of his other high-profile artifacts, Barnum began building a buzz around the creatures well before they were displayed:

> The showman announced the arrival of his first pair of belugas with a card in the New York press that invited readers to join him in search of the whales, his hiring of thirty-five local men to capture them, his arrangements with steamers and railroads 'to convey these leviathans to New-York at the fastest possible speed,' and his construction of their 'reservoir' in the Museum's basement. The focus of the exhibit was clearly not the whales, but on the complicated process that brought them to the Museum, a point Barnum underscores in *Struggles* when he casually notes that the whales 'soon died.' (Adams, 1997, p. 86)

Menagerie and The Happy Family

"Before the formation of the Central Park Zoo in the mid-1860s, the American Museum was the best place in New York to view exotic animals. The menagerie at the Ann Street Museum included (at various times): tigers, crocodiles, giraffes, anacondas, grizzly bears, a hippopotamus, a sloth, and a manatee" (Adams, 1997, p. 78). Although this seems unusual when compared to today's practice of grouping animals together in Zoos, apart from art and historical artifacts, it was not unprecedented. Charles Willson

Peale's American Museum in Philadelphia had also exhibited several live animals, and when the museum was closed his many children were allowed to treat them as pets.

Popular from the very start, Barnum's Happy Family exhibition delighted visitors by allowing them to see animals living in harmony that were natural predators of one another. Barnum had first gotten the idea for this when visiting an institution in London, and then hired trainers to keep peace between the creatures back in New York. This particular exhibit must have been a favorite for Barnum and his visitors because it is featured on nearly every advertisement for the American Museum.

Sometimes, as with the White Whales, Barnum would bring in a unique animal that would serve as its own attraction. Such was the case with the Hippopotamus:

> On the 12th of August, 1861, I began to exhibit the first and only genuine hippopotamus that had ever been seen in America, and for several weeks the Museum was thronged by the curious who came to see the monster. I advertised him extensively and ingeniously, as 'the great behemoth of the Scriptures,' giving a full description of the animal and his habits, and thousand of cultivated people, biblical students, and others, were attracted to this novel exhibition. (Barnum, 1873, p. 566)

Paintings, Pictures, and Engravings

According to the guidebook, artworks such as paintings and engravings were not in an isolated section of the museum, but rather were dispersed throughout the building wherever there was sufficient wall space. In the Second Saloon, for instance, along with cases of stuffed birds, relics from China and England, and the glass-blowing exhibition, several framed paintings and a few engravings were situated.

Most of the images throughout the museum were portraits, but there was also a series of "Four Hunting Scenes," a "curious picture in straw-work and colors: subject: Palace of Rosenburg, Copenhagen" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 34), and a painting of the "Battle of Constantine the Great" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 60).

There are no biographical details about the figures listed in the guidebook as portrait-paintings, but a list of titles includes names both familiar and unknown: "Engraving: Duchess of Kent, mother of Queen Victoria," "John Adams," William B. Giles," Col. Gibson," "Dr. Pascalis," "Alexander Hamilton," "Queen Margaret," "Daniel Webster," "Solomon Southwick, Sr." and more.

A painting of John Scudder is also mentioned in the 1863 guidebook, though no image survives, and no artist is listed. When the guidebook was published, Barnum had owned the museum for twenty-two years. By continuing to display Scudder's portrait so many years later, it seems likely Barnum found it important to recognize those that came before him in the museum field.

In the Third Saloon, a large engraving of New York, as seen from Brooklyn Heights, is featured. It is noted in the guidebook that the engraving "faithfully represents the great city" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 56), showing the importance that was placed on realism at the time. While abroad in Europe, Barnum expressed his interest in adding to his art collection. In Barnum's description of what he was looking for, he repeatedly uses the word "correct," again placing an interest on realism:

> I want to get some beautiful dissolving views painted in London illustrating the *history of the American Revolution*, and in order to do that I must have correct prints, *colored* so as to give the correct colors of the *military costumes* &c….First, I want the landing of our forefathers at Plymouth, then an Indian treaty or two (I already have *Penn's* treaty), then any pictures of their skirmishes with the Indians, then the picture of throwing over the *tea* in Boston harbor, then *all the different battles* both by *land* and *sea,* also a good view of *Bunker Hill as it now is,* &c. &c. &c.—affording a complete pictorial history of our country up to the close of the Revolution—& a group of Liberty, the American flags, shield and the devil and all as a grad and glorious *finale* to the patriotic drama. A good view of Fannieul [*sic*] Hall, Washington's seat at Mount Vernon, &c. &c. would all help will up the plot. Also correct portraits of all our Presidents, though on the whole I only care for those of Washington & Jefferson & [*pointing hand*] Jackson! (Saxon, 1983, p. 31)

It is likely Barnum sought out portraits of American Presidents and historical paintings of the American Revolution in London, rather than securing them back home in the United States, because at the time, artworks were more highly regarded if they came from Europe. American works of art were considered inferior by nineteenth-century art connoisseurs, so Barnum may have felt that by bringing artwork back from Europe his museum would be held with higher regard as being exotic or sophisticated.

Several other artworks are displayed in the Fourth Saloon. It is here we are able to see the careful distinctions made in the labels between a "painting" and a "picture." They often hang adjacent to one another, and it appears as though the subject matter of pictures were objects, such as "Flags of all nations," whereas portraits and landscapes were always paintings. There is no mention as to which medium the "pictures" are in, but we can assume they are not photographs, as those are always separately labeled as well.

A large section of portrait-paintings in the Fourth Saloon are likely those painted by late museum proprietor Charles Willson Peale. In his autobiography, Barnum showed his affinity for the works when he reported, "the splendid Gallery of American Portraits, was transferred to my American Museum" (Barnum, 1855, p. 243). Many of Peale's famous subjects such as "George Washington," "Samuel Adams," and "James Madison" are included in this group, but there are family portraits such as "Mrs. C. W. Peale." By 1863, Barnum had already acquired the contents of both the New York and Philadelphia branches of Peale's museums.

Daguerreotypes and Photographs

Popular, but not yet common, photography was still a novel exhibition for visitors to come across in the museum setting. Barnum's American Museum was located across

the street from the studio of Mathew Brady, and several images that appear in the museum may have come from that studio, though they are not credited as such in the guidebook. There is evidence that Brady photographed many of Barnum's living curiosities, and postcards and cartes-de-visites were printed from the daguerreotypes to be sold alongside the exhibitions.

Daguerreotypes of Barnum, Tom Thumb, Jenny Lind, and other notable figures who would have been recognizable to visitors are introduced in the Third Saloon. There are side-by-side portraits of the famous midget Tom Thumb and his parents, perhaps arranged so that visitors skeptical of the origins of the tiny man could study their likenesses.

In the Fourth Saloon, a photograph of the Japanese Embassy is exhibited between a painting of "St. George and the Dragon" and a painting of "Daniel Boone." It is not indicated in any of Barnum's autobiographies or letters why he decided to curate his exhibitions as he did.

The Fifth Saloon features something called the "Rogues' Gallery," a section of daguerreotypes depicting noted criminals. This fascination with outlaws is also seen in the wax figures in this and other museums around the United States in the mid-nineteenth century.

Sculptures and Statues

As with the paintings, most of the sculptures and statues included in Barnum's collection are figures. Busts of unidentified figures were exhibited alongside "Earl of Munster," "Jenny Lind," and "Cupid Asleep." The media for most of these works, as well as the artists, remains a mystery since that information is absent from the guidebook.

One listing in the guidebook is boastful, yet still vague: "Statue of Venus, life size. This Venus is celebrated in all parts of the world, where Art is appreciated, and, by some critics, has been pronounced superior to that of the Medici" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 55). This may have been the work of Hiram Powers, one of Barnum's favorite sculptors, whose work also appeared in his home.

Elements of patriotism in the young country continued to be seen in the art displayed at the American Museum. A bust of Benjamin Franklin is identified as "an excellent work of art by the great sculptor, Canova" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 60). There are so few artists identified throughout the guidebook that this particular piece is immediately deemed more important by the inclusion of a name. A picture of the Declaration of Independence hung nearby.

Glass-Blowing Exhibition

The catalogue description for the exhibition of glass-blowing reads:

> This art deserves the close attention of all lovers of the curious and beautiful. The Glass Blower of the Museum, who is one of the oldest and best artists of that department in the city, twirls handily his glass rods of every hue, and, with magic-like rapidity, creates birds of paradise, ships, pens, roses, feathers, and every imaginable object, out of glass, with as much ease as if it were sealing wax. (*Catalogue,* 1963, pp. 19-20)

The demonstration itself was seamlessly integrated into the Second Saloon of the museum, and for the first time since entering, visitors encountered a *live* exhibition.

While the demonstration of glass blowing is touted in the guidebook, what it does not discuss is that this was also another opportunity for the museum to make money. Throughout the museum, Barnum had exhibitions that also either sold things (such as glass souvenirs), or provided a service (perhaps a phrenology reading, or a shoeshine). They were not relegated to a single area, such as a gift shop, but were instead spread

throughout the building. As can be seen by looking at the history of museums in America prior to Barnum, staying financially afloat was a challenge to most museum proprietors. Barnum experimented with several measures to ensure that his museum would not only survive, but also thrive and keep visitors coming back.

Wax Figures

The Third Saloon is pictured in the guidebook as the Wax Figure Department. While this is not all that was featured in the large space, the guidebook includes descriptions of several scenes involving wax figures displayed in the cases.

The "Trial of Christ" featured at least 27 figures, all "dressed in the Jewish and Roman costumes which were worn at the time of our Saviour" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 56). The guidebook also claims that this contains "the largest group of wax figures, representing any one subject to be found on this continent" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 56). This was not the only museum in America to feature these sorts of attractions. The Western Museum of Cincinnati was already famous for its realistic scenes of Hell in "The Infernal Regions" (Dennett, 1997, p. 111).

Aside from staged scenes of wax figures who interacted with one another, there were several notable individuals represented in the American Museum. Most of them were likenesses of famous (human) living curiosities such as "Daniel Lambert, the English Mammoth, who when living weighed 739 lbs., and measured 9 ft. 7 inches around the waist" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 58), or famous figures such as "Nicholas I., Emperor of Russia" and "Napoleon" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 58).

Objects of Scientific Interest and Inventions

Mirrors and magnets appear in various rooms and cases with great variety. The mirrors are described as "convex looking-glass," "reducing looking-glass," "enlarging

looking-glass," and "a curious Reflecting mirror, showing the countenance in a front view, and two side views. This mirror affords a person the desirable, but uncommon, advantage of seeing himself as others see him" (*Catalogue*, 1863, pp. 34, 37). Since many of these mirrors are now typically seen as "fun-house" mirrors, it is possible to see another connection for critics to make between Barnum's establishment and a place of pure entertainment. However, many nineteenth-century visitors were encountering these reflecting anomalies for the first time, so they would not have made the immediate jump to associate them with fun houses as we would today with our twenty-first century frame of reference.

Machines were another hit with visitors who were just beginning to see the applications of new technology that emerged from the Industrial Revolution. Barnum featured a machine that tested one's strength (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 59), and brought back ideas for other machines from his visits to Europe: "The models of machinery exhibited in the Royal Polytechnic Institution in London pleased me so well, that I procured a duplicate; also duplicates of the Dissolving Views, the Chromatrope and Physioscope" (Barnum, 1855, p. 344).

Native Americans and their Relics

There was a growing fascination with the "wild west" as stories of westward expansion made their way back to New York City. Barnum exhibited several artifacts from these trips, and was especially interested in showcasing the belongings of the Native American tribes. "Feather covered hats," "Belts of the Sioux of the Mississippi," an "Indian Deerskin Hunting Shirt, and "an Indian shot pouch" were displayed as exotic evidence of what lay beyond the city boundaries (*Catalogue*, 1863, pp. 56-57). The

exhibitions were spread throughout the museum, but were most prominently displayed in the Third and Sixth Saloons.

The highlight of Barnum's exhibition of Native Americans was actually a short-lived display of several live American Indian Chiefs. In 1844, Barnum briefly partnered with artist George Catlin in New York City and in Europe for a short tour of these powerful figures. Catlin served as the liaison between Barnum and the Chiefs, who believed they were being honored, and became very angry when they later discovered Barnum was charging admission for people to see them (Saxon, 1983, p. 27). Catlin was well known at the time for his detailed paintings of Native American people, but it is not recorded whether Barnum ever exhibited Catlin's artworks.

Worldly Artifacts

Chinese coins, a suit of armor, carved smoking pipes, an ivory bracelet, and Japanese idols were grouped together in a single case in the Second Saloon. A product of the nineteenth-century, the state of cultural understanding is undeniably low in the description of the carved idols: "However uncouth these unsightly and miserable attempts at sculpture appear to the inhabitants of civilized nations, they are highly revered and valued at home, where they receive the worship and adoration of millions of ignorant Heathen" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 21).

Another popular attraction was an American mummy found in Mammoth Cave, Kentucky, "supposed to have been that of a Queen, from the number of trinkets and rude insignia of wealth and power which were found with it" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 38). Descriptions of four layers of wrappers, the condition of the remains, and the nature of the era the figure may have come from is included in the guidebook. While much of this appears to be conjecture, the author makes an effort to concoct a complete narrative.

Coins from around the world, as well as "Old Continental Currency" were exhibited in cases for visitors to examine. It does not appear they were exhibited with other artifacts from their respective countries, but were instead grouped together in a currency section within the Second and Fourth Saloons.

Simple tools and instruments were also of interest in the American Museum, Snow shoes from Norway, a Turkish dagger, and Mexican spurs were situated in adjoining cases in the Sixth Saloon. There is even an illustration of the snow shoe in the guidebook, being that it was so unusual to visitors.

Perhaps one of the more unexpected cases was in the Seventh Saloon:

> Four cases, containing the largest and must curious collection of shoes in the world. These comprise shoes worn throughout all nations from the year 1760 down to the present time. Shoes are here with high heels, low heels, and no heels, covered with satin, cloth, hair braids, and leather; ornamented with tinsel, spangles, ribbons, bows, and buckles; the French sabots, or peasant's wooden shoes; the Chinese wood-soled shoes; the English clog, &c., &c., &c. (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 101)

Historical Artifacts

An interest in ancient and rare artifacts from around the world is indicated in the lists of collection items in the Sixth Saloon. Some examples include an "Ancient Lamp, from Pompeii; Mummied Crocodile, from the Catacombs of ancient Thebes; Ancient Pottery found at Lyon; Specimen of Mosaic, from Rome; a Bowl, 500 years old, from the city of Ucamal, in Central America; Antique Marble, from Nero's Palace, Rome" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 92). The labels for the artifacts are not separate, but instead they all appear to have been in a single case, with simply titles, not descriptions.

One exception to this is for the "Tear cups, for funeral processions, at Rome." "The following account is given of the uses of the Tear Cup, one of which is seen in this case: At the death of an individual, every friend and relative, who accompanies the corpse

to the grave, carries one of these cups, in which they collect all their tears. At the grave the contents are poured on the top of the coffin, and the cups and coffin buried together" (*Catalogue,* 1863, p. 93).

Autographs and Memorabilia

The concept of celebrity is not new to this country, and in fact, Barnum was already well aware at the drawing power that famous figures could have on visitors. As the celebrity was not always available in person, Barnum found it important to leave a memento or an autograph in their place at the museum. Signatures from Jenny Lind, Jules Benedict, Giovanni Belletti, and Patroon Livingston were displayed.

Other political and royal figures are represented by their autographs, including George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Lord Brougham.

Models

Barnum also featured a small collection of models at his museum. The collection included "a steamship, copied by the Chinese after one which visited their ports" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 57), and "a correct model of the Malakoff fortifications, Russia, composed of 10,226 separate pieces of wood, although occupying but two feet of space. The Malakoff was reputed one of the strongest specimens of modern fortifications" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 55). It appears Barnum was interested in showing the advancements of precision and technology in these models, and showcases this in his working model of Niagara Falls.

This unique model, "the great model of Niagara Falls with real water! which Barnum advertised so effectively that the Board of Croton Water Commissioners feared he would dry up the city's water supply" (Orosz, 1990, pp. 175-176). Little did they realize that the Falls were actually eighteen inches tall, and used only a barrel of water,

> A curiosity that had much merit and some absurdity. It was a model of Niagara Falls, in which the merit was that the proportions of the great cataract, the trees, rocks, and building in the vicinity were mathematically given, while the absurdity was in introducing 'real water' to represent the falls. (Barnum, 1873, p. 126)

Living Curiosities

Barnum took great pride in presenting an ever-changing cast of *live* exhibitions. Many of the figures became internationally famous with the aid of Barnum's marketing skills. These "living curiosities" were displayed both in rooms within the museum, and at times on stage in the Lecture Room.

In a letter to Boston museum proprietor Moses Kimball on January 30, 1843, readers can see the urgency and importance that Barnum placed on frequently rotating these live exhibitions: "I *must* have the fat boy or the other monster or something new *in the course of this week* so as to be *sure* to put them in the General's place *next Monday*, *so don't fail!*" (Saxon, 1983, p. 13). Kimball and Barnum were frequent collaborators, and often shared or exchanged exhibitions to keep their visitors coming back.

The living curiosities were of interest both to the general public and the scientific community who were engaged in "tetratology—the study of malformations and monstrosities or *Lusus naturae* 'jests of nature'" (Sellers, 1979, p. 60).

Perhaps the most famous of all of Barnum's finds was the midget Tom Thumb. Thumb, whose real name was Charlie Stratton, was only 4 years old when Barnum was introduced to him in his hometown of Bridgeport, Connecticut. His parents relayed the story that their child simply stopped growing at 7 months of age, leaving him measuring 25 inches and weighing 15 pounds: "Upon seeing him, Barnum instantly recognized the extraordinary possibilities that the boy represented" (Kunhardt et al, 1995, p. 48). The pair would spend much of their time together over the next few decades, during which

time Thumb would meet with Presidents and Royalty, perform in costumes for sold-out crowds, and marry in an elaborate ceremony attended by the elite of New York City.

The "What Is It?" exhibit was left as an open-ended enigma for visitors to ponder: "The thing is not to be called *anything* by the exhibitor. We know not & therefore do not assert whether it is human or animal. We leave that all to the sagacious public to decide" (Saxon, 1983, p. 35). In fact, there were several "What Is It?" exhibits, but the original and most famous was actually "an 18-year-old microcephalic black dwarf named William Henry Johnson, discovered by Barnum in late 1859 or early 1860 and enlisted into a lifetime of coconspiracy" (Kunhardt et al, 1995, p. 149). The What Is It? Exhibition debuted just a few months after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*, and Kunhardt (1995) suggests, "Barnum was playing into an international obsession with the search for the so-called missing link of evolution" (p. 149).

An entirely different type of living curiosity was the exhibition of babies, entered into the show by their parents who were visitors of the Museum. In June 1855, Barnum organized and implemented his first "Baby Show," meant to showcase the range of shapes, sizes, and similarities amongst the youngest visitors. It was "the most popular participatory event in the history of the museum" (Adams, 1997, p. 100). Attendance over the first four days was a reported 60,920 patrons.

Aside from giving out cash prizes in categories such as finest twin, fattest baby, and finest baby, Barnum claimed that the Baby Shows were providing a public service because they brought parents together for education on child rearing and health issues. Not all visitors came to see the children, however, and a reporter for the *New York Times* reportedly overheard a spectators divulge the real reason for their visit: "Now I've seen the babies, and been standing for an hour, I want to see Barnum, and then I'm ready to go back to old Kentuck (*sic)*" (Adams, 1997, p. 75).

Misinformation

Misinformation given at Barnum's American Museum can be discussed in two segments: unintentional and deliberate. Unintentional misinformation was a product of the age in which Barnum operated. While many studies were being conducted in the natural sciences and anthropology, some of the information provided in the guidebook, and certainly at the museum, was not true. I've found instances in the guidebook where rumors and verbal anecdotes are printed: "Specimens of these animals [vampire bats] have been seen measuring six feet from the tip of one wing to that of the other" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 29), and "According to opinion in India, the elephant lives three hundred years" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 19). What we know today is that the average wingspan of a vampire bat is about a foot long and the average life span of an elephant is about 70 years. This information was not available to authors of the 1863 guidebook, however, so while we can be surprised they printed information that could not be verified, we can understand they were not trying to deceive the public by printing it.

Deliberate misinformation, on the other hand, was also disseminated by Barnum to draw attention to exhibitions and incite public discussion. Exhibitions such as the manufactured Fejee Mermaid were concocted by Barnum to draw in more visitors, but he felt this was a harmless practice: "Barnum argued that he had not defrauded the people by humbugging them, for they had received more than their money's worth. He went beyond that rationalization, however, to claim that the humbugs had merely served as lures to attract the public. Once inside, they could not fail to learn from his valuable collection" (Orosz, 1990, p. 224).

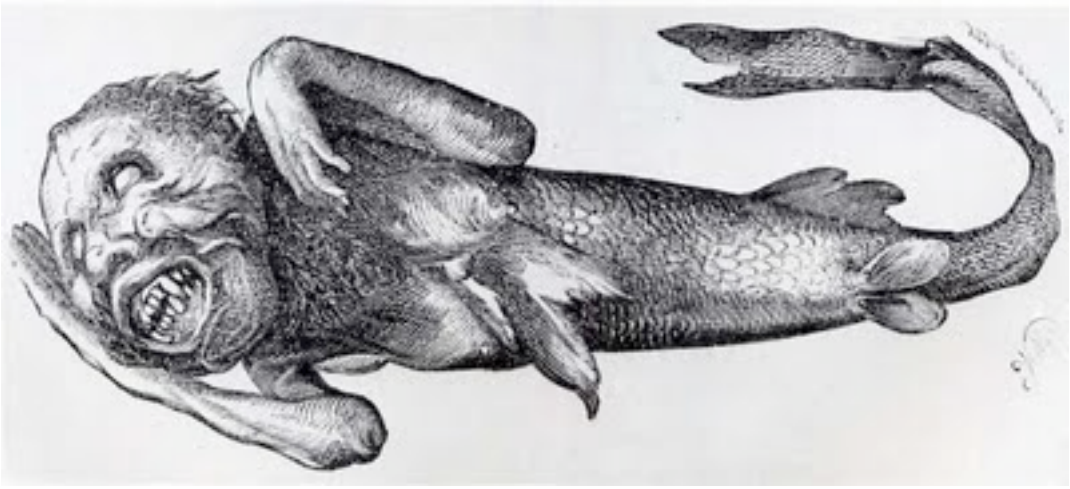


Illustration 3: The Fejee Mermaid

It appeared that Barnum could not go wrong with the Fejee mermaid: "The mermaid immediately tripled his patronage. Eventually it was denounced as a fake by leading naturalists, but to their befuddlement, this only made Barnum's turnstiles busier, for people returned to see how they had been duped" (Orosz, 1990, p. 176). The artifact itself was loaned to Barnum from Moses Kimball of the Boston Museum, who claimed to have purchased it from a Boston Sea Captain who found it in Fejee. It was a compilation of the top half of a monkey sewn to the bottom half of a fish, and preserved through rudimentary taxidermy. It was small, and not at all what many visitors expected.

Barnum set out to create a media buzz around the arrival of the specimen to New York City: "He printed enticing stories about the discovery of the mermaid near the Fejee Islands (Hawaii) by the fictitious Dr. J. Griffin from London's 'Lyceum of Natural History.' (Griffin was, in fact, a longtime Barnum collaborator named Levi Lyman)" (Dennett, 1997, p. 18). The press took the bait and followed Dr. Griffin as he made his way on a fictional tour of the United States until he arrived in New York to display the curiosity for a week at the Concert Hall in early August, 1843. The public's demand to

see the mermaid was huge, and Barnum subsequently exhibited the creature in his American Museum.

While it was on display, further (mis)information about the mermaid was perpetuated:

> Lyman, surrounded by numerous connecting links in nature, as set forth in the advertisement, and with the hideous–looking mermaid firmly secured from the hands of visitors by a glass vase, enlightened his audiences by curious accounts of his travels and adventures, and by scientific harangues upon the works of nature in general, and mermaids in particular. (Barnum, 1855, p. 238)

Barnum was not the first museum proprietor to display an item under false pretenses. More than 50 years earlier, in 1795, the Tammany Museum (Under Gardiner Baker) exhibited a fraudulent perpetual motion machine: "By contrast, it is instructive to note that Peale exhibited a similar machine in his museum for the purpose of demonstrating the concealed mechanism that actuated it, and thus denouncing it as a fraud" (Orosz, 1990, p. 64).

The Lecture Room

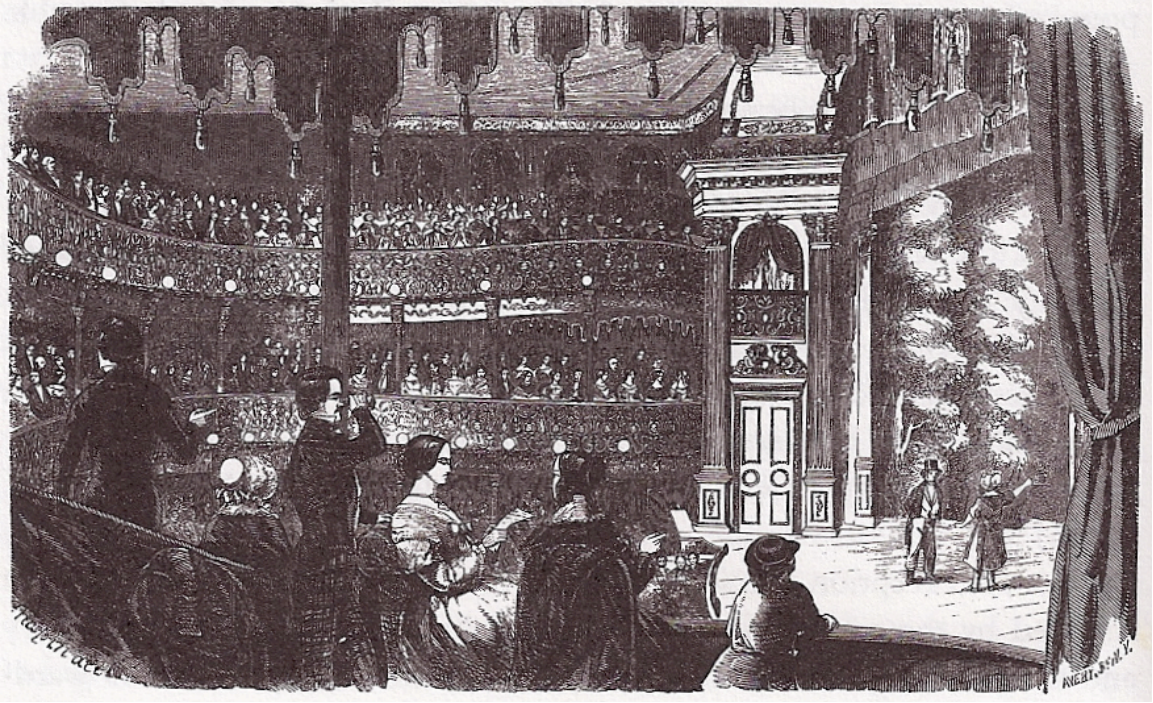


Illustration 4: The Lecture Room inside Barnum's American Museum

According to Orosz (1990), "Barnum successfully attracted patrons by means of a three-pronged program of action. The triad consisted of didactic theater, spectacular entertainments, and awe-inspiring exhibits" (p. 175). This placed a great deal of importance on the Lecture Room, where two of those three prongs played out under an arch above the stage that read: "We study to please."

Barnum's Lecture Room was publically dedicated to "moral drama" in a ceremony on June 17, 1850, "following nine weeks of remodeling. The celebration marked the culmination of a series of expansions to the Lecture Room from its origins in the 1840s as a cramped hall" (Adams, 1997, p. 118). In the guidebook of 1863, it is described as "a beautifully-adorned Lecture Room, which is one of the most spacious and well-ventilated of any in the city, and from which, as well as from the Halls of the

Museum, are excluded all intoxicating liquors, profanity, loose characters, and every thing which is objectionable of the good moral sense of the community" (*Catalogue*, 1863, p. 4). This statement is typical of descriptions of the space, which nearly all include a reference to how beautiful it is as well as how safe it is for moral citizens.

The reason for the emphasis on moral purity was to set Barnum's Lecture Room apart from the Theaters of New York (and other big cities): "Antitheater prejudice [was] common among midcentury Christians…and many antebellum playhouses invited censure by supporting themselves with prostitution and in-house bars (Adams, 1997, p. 120). Barnum worked to reform not only the physical appearance of the Lecture Room, but also the hearts and minds of his visitors by presenting plays as moral lessons.

A production of the temperance play *The Drunkard* proved to be so popular that it "became the first play in New York to chalk up one hundred uninterrupted performances, and all were on the stage of the American Museum" (Orosz, 1990, p. 175).

Museum Employees

Barnum could not run such a large and successful establishment on his own, and in his autobiography he tells readers, "At all times, during the last twelve years, I have had in my constant employ from one hundred to three hundred persons, besides thousands who have been indirectly engaged as accessories in my different enterprises" (Barnum, 1855, p. 394). His primary assistants were Parson Hitchcock and John Greenwood Jr. Both these men were at one point responsible for the day-to-day operation of the museum, especially when Barnum went abroad to Europe.

Other employees were charged with more specific roles, such as Dr. Oscar Kohn who was "primarily responsible for looking after the animals at the Museum and later in Barnum's circus" (Saxon, 1983, p. 113). In 1864, Greenwood took on a new role and

went abroad in quest of attractions, leaving David W. Thompson and Samuel H. Hurd (Barnum's son-in-laws) in charge of the managerial duties of the museum (Saxon, 1983, p. 127).

Measuring Success

Barnum himself had lofty goals for his institution, and worked hard to ensure its success: "I was determined to *deserve* success, and brain and hands and feet were alike busy in forwarding the interests of the Museum" (Barnum, 1855, p. 222). Financial success came quickly, and Barnum was able to pay off his initial loan of twelve thousand dollars that purchased the collections after being open only fifteen months. Most of the profits from the museum were fed back into the collections, and "three years after he took over the museum, Barnum claimed to possess thirty thousand exhibits…by 1865 the American Museum boasted a collection of over 850,000 items" (Dennett, 1997, pp. 26-27).

To be successful, Barnum understood the important role his visitors would play, not just for their own satisfaction, but also for their role in marketing:

> To send away my visitors more than doubly satisfied, was to induce them to come again and to bring their friends. I meant to make people talk about my Museum; to exclaim over its wonders; to have men and women all over the country say: 'There is not another place in the United States where so much can be seen for twenty-five cents as in Barnum's American Museum.' (Barnum, 1873, p. 125)

The high profile visitors he attracted might also be a way to measure the museum's success. President Abraham Lincoln was a distinguished guest on Wednesday February 20, 1861 (Saxon, 1983, p. 111), and the Prince of Wales stopped by in 1860 (Dennett, 1997, p. 25), but it was a visit from Louis Gaylord Clar, Esq. who made Barnum nervous. Clar was the witty and popular editor of the *Knickerbocker* magazine. In his autobiography, Barnum recounted the visit by Clar: "I was extremely anxious that

my establishment should receive a 'first-rate notice' in his popular magazine, and therefore accompanied him through the entire Museum, taking especial pains to point out all objects of interest" (Barnum, 1855, p. 227).

Barnum himself also became a recognizable and famous figure because of his museum. One anecdote relays the interest visitors had in getting a glimpse of him:

> On one occasion, soon after my return from abroad, I was sitting in the ticket-office reading a newspaper. A man came and purchased a ticket of admission, 'Is Barnum in the Museum?' he asked. The ticket-seller, pointing to me, answered, 'This is Mr. Barnum.' Supposing the gentleman had business with me, I looked up from the paper. 'Is this Mr. Barnum?' he asked. 'It is,' I replied. He stared at me for a moment, and then, throwing down his ticket, he exclaimed, 'It's all right. I have got the worth of my money;' and away he went, without going into the Museum at all! (Barnum, 1855, p. 293)

The Fate of the Museums

The museum at Broadway and Ann Street burned to the ground on July 13, 1865. While the cause was never discovered, Barnum immediately planned to rebuild: "My museum is all destroyed. I am cast down but not dismayed. I think of building a new museum" (Saxon, 1983, p. 136). Though a few artifacts were saved, it was estimated that he lost collections worth more than $400,000. "It was insured for less than $40,000" (Orosz, 1990, p. 225).

During the period between his museums, Barnum took up the cause of lobbying to create a free, national museum. In a July 22, 1865 letter to his uncle, Bayard Taylor, Barnum wrote that he,

> has been made rich by catering for *the children*. The youth of America regard the loss of Barnum's Museum as irreparable. Fathers & mothers mourn its destruction on account of their children. Why should not Barnum (who in fact was always more of a philanthropist than a humbug) establish a *free museum* for the instruction and edification of the *Youth of America!* In fact, erect a fireproof building and open in it a well stocked collection of the works of nature & art, relics, &c. open free to the public—the same as is the British Museum, the

> Louvre, Versailles, Japanese Museum of Holland, &c. One is *governmental* & the other an individual enterprise. I want to do this & I *will* if it is feasible. (Saxon, 1983, pp. 140-141)

This idea never materialized, but Barnum did open his second American Museum in New York only eight weeks later, in September 1865. In many ways, he had to start from scratch and build a new collection, but he had many connections now and it did not take long for him to be able to boast a collection of over 100,000 new items.

Another strategy for gathering new collection items is discussed by Barnum in a separate letter to Taylor. Barnum had the idea to request donations from public governmental museums of Europe (such as the Louvre), where he could then label the artifacts "Presented by Louis Napoleon, Emperor of France….No matter scarcely how little the intrinsic value of these contributions, the *names* of the donors would render them *very attractive*" (Saxon, 1983, pp. 137-138). Whether or not this approach was successful is not recorded.

The new museum was also at a new address north of where the old building rested. He found a three-story granite building on Broadway, just north of Canal Street, closer to the center of the city. He leased the space from renowned animal-trainer Isaac Van Amburgh, who later partnered with Barnum on a menagerie next door. They expanded the buildings back away from the street, and Barnum added a new Lecture Room that could seat 2,500 spectators. Kunhardt el al (1995) report, "The new museum quickly became as popular as the old. Barnum had an art gallery, a rooftop rifle range, a glassblowers' exhibit, and an in-house photography studio, where customers could have their portraits taken while they waited" (p. 196).

Shortly after midnight on March 3, 1868, the new museum was struck by fire, and once again, Barnum lost everything. The fire broke out on the third floor, but as was the case when his first museum burned, no cause for the fire was ever determined.

According to *Harper's Weekly,* "Several persons who lived in the building, including several monstrosities of the show, were rescued, as were also a few of the wild animals belonging to the menagerie; but most of these, and al the minor curiosities of the Museum were lost" (March 21, 1868, p. 188). Winter was still in full effect that year, so as soon as the water struck the building, it instantly iced over, creating a most unusual looking ruins at the site (see Illustration 5).

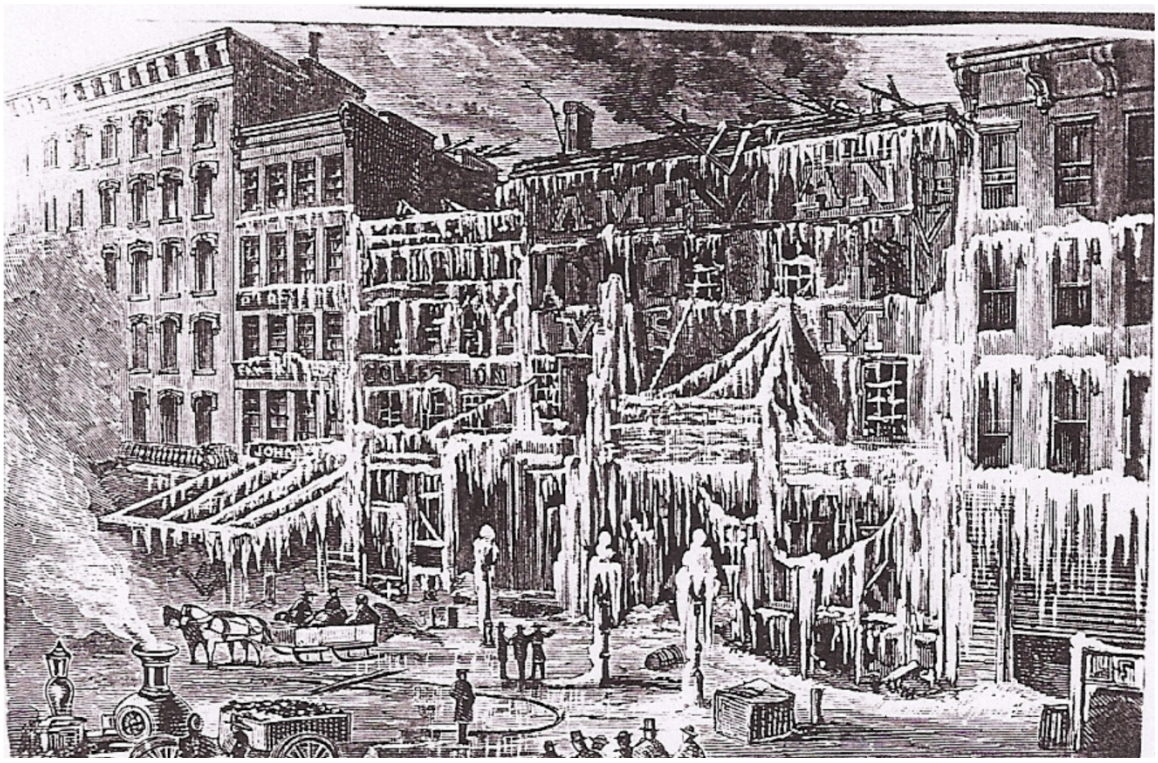


Illustration 5: Barnum's second museum in ruins after a fire

BARNUM'S SIDE PROJECTS AND PERSONAL CAUSES

Barnum kept busy throughout his life by juggling multiple business ventures. During his years as a museum proprietor he also experimented with publishing a weekly, illustrated newspaper that was designed to be a better, American, version of the *London Illustrated News*. The short-lived paper was first published in 1852, and folded after only forty-eight issues. Barnum commissioned artists for "drawings & sketches of everything interesting in all parts of the world….We will agree to pay liberally for all sketches sent us which we use, & we shall try to use everything important" (Saxon, 1983, p. 62).

As for the editorial content, Barnum attempted to secure big name authors, such as William Makepeace Thackeray, to contribute their writings. Thackeray declined, even after hearing the argument from Barnum that, "Our journal will be one of the first class and the highest respectability" (Saxon, 1983, p. 61).

Another writing project remained constant for Barnum throughout his career. He recorded the events of his life for publication in letters and autobiographies: "For many nineteenth-century reviewers, Barnum's *Life* epitomized a growing flood of autobiographies that were spreading immorality and corruption throughout the land" (Whalen, 2000, p. ix). The first edition sold 160,000 copies and he was hailed as a best-selling author.

Although Barnum earned his fame and fortune in New York City, he preferred to live in Bridgeport, Connecticut. As the town's most famous citizen, Barnum tried his best to make improvements: "He was a real-estate developer in Bridgeport, parceling out small lots because he believed that the working class should become home owners" (Orosz, 1990, p. 223). He even went so far as to run for political office, and in 1875, Barnum was elected mayor of Bridgeport, at the age of 64. His political career

continued: “After the war, Barnum was elected to the Connecticut legislature, where he made a reputation as a strong foe of corporate monopolists” (Orosz, 1990, p. 223).

At various points in Barnum’s life, he was active on the lecture circuit for different causes throughout the United States. For example, “during the Civil War, Barnum became a leading spokesman for the Union cause” (Orosz, 1990, p. 223). He also fought for women’s rights, and was a passionate teetotaler: “The morning that I signed the pledge, I obtained over twenty signatures in Bridgeport. I talked temperance to all in the adjacent towns and villages. I spent the entire winter and spring of 1851-2 in lecturing through my native State, always travelling at my own expense, and I was glad to know that I aroused many hundred, perhaps thousands, to the importance of the temperance reform” (Barnum, 1855, p. 362).

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have briefly described Barnum’s upbringing and provided some detail on the collections that were housed at the American Museum. P.T. Barnum emerged as the most popular and successful museum proprietor of his time: “Over forty-one million visitors trooped through the museum during his period of ownership” (Orosz, 1990, p. 172). In Chapter Five I discuss the educational effects of the museum by examining Barnum’s museum practices through the lens of three contemporary educational discourses, thus supporting the argument that P.T. Barnum engaged in educational practices through his work in the American Museum.

Chapter 5: *Finding Educational Outcomes in Barnum's American Museum and Conclusions Drawn from the Research*

The goal of this study has been to determine the role of education in Barnum's American Museum, and to examine what educational methods Barnum and his staff employed when engaging visitors in the museum. In Chapter Four I discussed Barnum's collections and the nature of his Museum; in this chapter I examine his Museum in relation to education, and draw the study to a conclusion with a review of my research, a discussion of Barnum's legacy, and suggestions for further research related to Barnum.

BARNUM AND HIS EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHIES

Determining a comprehensive definition of what education entails is difficult even in contemporary terms, but it can be even trickier to assert what a society in the past understood to be "educational." For instance, in Barnum's age it was believed, "the process of becoming refined was one of literally being next to or in the presence of an object of value or its well-made copy….We can call this collection of beliefs about learning essentialist or osmotic" (Leinhardt, 2004, pp. 2-3). Thus, it will be impossible to know exactly what Barnum's visitors experienced in the late nineteenth-century, but we do know that Barnum himself believed he was doing a public service by educating the masses, seemingly describing a "university of the people" when discussing his museum:

> I have been a public benefactor….My travelling museums of natural history have been the largest and most interesting ever exhibited in the United States, and no author, or university even, has ever accomplished as much in the diffusion of knowledge of the varied forms and classes of animal life. These, with my museums in New-York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, have been one of the chief means by which I have instructed the masses. (Barnum, 1855, p. 400)

For the purpose of this study I offer a look at efforts made by Barnum and his museum staff to create a museum that promoted the "diffusion of knowledge." Unfortunately, I

will not be able to discuss the outcomes of effects of these educational endeavors as determined and reported by the visitor; the voices of visitors to Barnum's museums are now silent.

To aid in this discussion I have examined several contemporary discourses of museum education to retroactively apply to Barnum and his practices. I argue these practices were present in the nineteenth-century, but do so using language and descriptors present in literature within museum education today. I contend that Barnum, (a) created an environment of free-choice learning, (b) can be viewed as a constructivist, and (c) embraced edutainment for the masses. By looking at Barnum's Museum practices through these lenses, my readers and I will have the benefit of a shared vocabulary that is also relevant to current research in the field. While this has largely been, to this point, a study of the past, the following section shows the connections that can be made between Barnum's Museum and contemporary discourses of museum education.

In Chapter Three I wrote about the emergence of American museums, situating their birth in 1782. It is important to understand that research about learning in museums does not go back this far, and has only been studied in more recent years. Also complicating the field are multiple interpretations about what constitutes best practice. In their latest book, *In Principle, In Practice* (2007), editors John Falk, Lynn Dierking and Susan Foutz state, "considerable progress has been made over the past ten years in our understanding of museum learning" (p. xvii). Great efforts are being made to organize and disseminate new research; the last section of *In Principle, In Practice* proposes an agenda of research to come, indicating there is still much more to learn.

When Barnum opened his first American Museum in 1841, there was no preexisting body of research on best practices in museums for him to draw from. He

encountered many of the same issues facing museums today, but research was not yet being conducted in the emerging field. According to George Hein (1998):

> All the approaches to education still used today, as well as many of the controversies surrounding them, were first introduced by pioneering staff members a century ago: didactic labels of varying length and complexity, lectures and other events for the public, special courses and programs for school groups, deliberately didactic exhibitions, and in-house and outreach programs for general and specific audiences. (p. 4)

In the following sections I present a brief overview of each of the applicable discourses of museum education, interspersed with my arguments about how Barnum employed the principles behind those discourses in his American Museum over a century before they were labeled as such and discussed by modern practitioners.

Creating an Environment of Free-Choice Learning

Free-choice learning "describes the learning that occurs in settings in which the learner is largely choosing what, how, where, and with whom to learn" (Falk, Dierking, & Foutz, 2007, p. xix). The term has been applied to institutions outside formal classrooms including, but not limited to, museums, public libraries, historical sites, and zoos. It frames learning as a leisure activity, and embraces socio-cultural dimensions, aesthetic understanding, shifts in attitudes, values and beliefs, as well as "typical" notions of learning such as ideas, facts and concepts (Falk & Dierking, 2002, p. 5).

In a recent study conducted in Canada, Falk and Dierking (2002) conclude, "virtually all of the learning in which adults participated occurred outside of school" (p. 6). The same can be assumed for adult education in the mid-nineteenth century, an era when most students left the classroom before high school, but an increase in leisure time was made possible through advances from the industrial revolution.

Another parallel between learning in Barnum's era and learning today is that "we are not born knowing what is important to learn, but as a society, as a community of learners, we must be guided to discover what is important to learn. There are three main places in society where we receive this guidance—schools and universities, the workplace, and the free-choice learning sector. All three are important; all three are essential for lifelong learning" (Falk & Dierking, 2002, p. 10). Barnum's era was perhaps the first to move towards a balance between all three of these sectors, though many Americans were still primarily focused on learning in the workplace because leisure time and opportunities to encounter free-choice learning were limited, and schools and universities were not readily available for the public at large. Since women, children, and minorities were not given equal opportunities in the schools and workplaces, free-choice learning environments such as Barnum's American Museum may have been one of only a limited number of access points to shared information for a majority of the masses.

In *Lessons Without Limit*, Falk and Dierking (2002) outline that free-choice learning is maximized when a series of factors are considered:

- All learning begins, and ends, with the individual's unique interests, motivations, prior knowledge, and experience.
- Learning is both an individual experience and a group experience. What someone learns, let alone why someone learns, is inextricably bound to the social, cultural, and historical context in which that learning takes place.
- Learning is facilitated by appropriate physical contexts and by well thought-out and built designs—the outdoors or an immersive zoo for learning about animals, an art museum or studio for learning about the visual arts, a historic site or reenactment for learning about history.
- Learning is influenced by the developmental stage that the person is at. (p. 56)

I will reflect and expand upon each of these factors in relation to Barnum and his American Museum in the following section.

Individual Interests and Motivations

Free-choice learning provides an opportunity for museums to allow people to pursue subjects they are curious about. This piqued curiosity plays a key role in the selections people make about which free-choice learning activities they will participate in. But curiosity is only one motivating factor. According to Falk and Dierking (2002),

> Researchers have found that humans are highly motivated to learn when: they are in supporting environments; they are engaged in meaningful activities; they are freed from anxiety, fear, and other negative mental states; they have choices and control over their learning; and the challenges of the task meet their skills. (p. 15)

Barnum worked hard to create a safe and supportive environment for his visitors and even went so far as to hire private detectives to roam the halls of the museum and eject drunks or women suspected of prostitution.

Free-choice learning is *intrinsically* motivated, or, done for its own sake. The opposite of this is *extrinsic* motivation, which is demonstrated "when the anticipated benefits are external to the activity" (Falk & Dierking, 2002, p. 16), such as studying for an exam or learning a process for work. Research "is emerging which shows that choice and control are fundamental constituents of learning" (Falk & Dierking, 2002, p. 40) and people with an interest in a specific topic will become more "fully engaged in learning about it" (Falk & Dierking, 2002, p. 40).

P.T. Barnum was able to harness people's interests and motivate them to learn in his museum through powerful marketing campaigns and by offering exhibits that visitors were both universally and individually interested in viewing. According to Falk and Dierking (2002), "most people are interested in food, in sex, in whatever gives them

power and acclaim, and in babies and pets" (p. 40). Barnum's exhibits of babies, animals, and human curiosities may have appealed to visitors' universal interests, while cases of rare coins, weapons, sculptures, and other art works would have appealed to more individual interests. The fact that he offered it all at one location, to provide something for everyone, shows how he was able to encourage vast opportunities for free-choice learning for millions of visitors.

Social, Cultural, Historical Context

Barnum was always looking for ways to provoke discussion from visitors to his American Museum, as well as from people who had not yet set foot in the Museum: "The one end aimed at was to make men and women think and talk and wonder, and, as a practical result, go to the Museum. This was my constant study and occupation" (Barnum, 1873, p. 125). Perhaps from this it can be interpreted that Barnum understood (on some basic level) that learning was a social experience, and perhaps he worked to offer exhibitions and gallery spaces that would facilitate conversations.

The topic of sociocultural learning is explored in Leinhardt and Knutson's (2004) book *Listening in on Museum Conversations*. They assert, "Objects in museums provide a springboard for visitors to discuss diverse and personal topics; that visitors try to figure out how objects were created or how they work; and also that spoken language is quite distinct from written language" (Leinhardt, 2004, p. 11). Although there are not any recordings of museum conversations from Barnum's American Museum, we can be sure that since "the Museum [was] certainly the great family resort of the population of New-York, and adjacent towns and villages, as well as an irresistible focus of attention for every one from the country who visits the great metropolis" (newspaper unknown, July 3,

1852), coupled with the fact that so many new and unusual objects were exhibited, many rich conversations are likely to have been shared in the galleries.

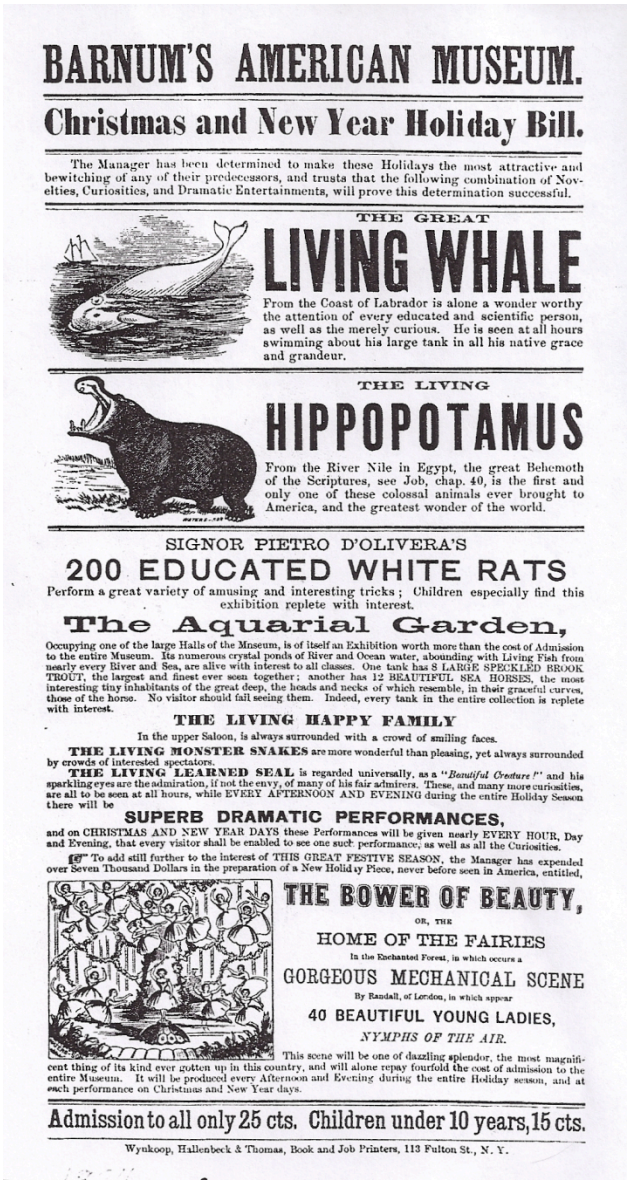
Although we know now that several of the artifacts displayed may have been misrepresented (either intentionally or not), the sociocultural aspects of learning would not have been diminished: "In the sociocultural way of looking at things, learning means less that an individual 'owns' certain knowledge–in the sense of having a valuable possession – and more that an individual can participate in a particular group or world in an active way" (Leinhart, 2004, p. 5). In this way, Barnum placed a higher importance on the beliefs of the visitor, than on the authority of the object or "experts."

Physical Context

Falk and Dierking (2002) argue that exposure to authentic objects is beneficial for learners, "by placing ourselves within an appropriate physical context, learning is significantly facilitated. We do not have to imagine what an elephant looks and smells like; we can actually see and smell it" (p. 55). Barnum provided visitors direct access to millions of objects, artifacts, and curiosities.

Interestingly, Falk and Dierking use an elephant as their example. Barnum's American Museum was one of the first institutions in the country to offer close access to elephants, along with countless other animals for visitors to experience for themselves. Barnum tried to alert the public to the rarity and importance of these creatures through handbills and newspaper ads. One advertisement (see illustration 6) for the Great Living Whale declares it to be "a wonder worthy the attention of every educated and scientific person, as well as the merely curious" (Handbill, 1864). Again, Barnum shows how his collections appeal to both scholars and the general public, a point emphasized by Orosz (1990): "The contemporary judges, both American and foreign, were able to find

considerable wheat along the chaff at the Barnum museums. It was the later historians who invented the museums with no redeeming social value" (p. 229).



BARNUM'S AMERICAN MUSEUM.

Christmas and New Year Holiday Bill.

The Manager has been determined to make these Holidays the most attractive and bewitching of any of their predecessors, and trusts that the following combination of Novelties, Curiosities, and Dramatic Entertainments, will prove this determination successful.

THE GREAT

LIVING WHALE

From the Coast of Labrador is alone a wonder worthy the attention of every educated and scientific person, as well as the merely curious. He is seen at all hours swimming about his large tank in all his native grace and grandeur.

THE LIVING

HIPPOPOTAMUS

From the River Nile in Egypt, the great Behemoth of the Scriptures, see Job, chap. 40, is the first and only one of these colossal animals ever brought to America, and the greatest wonder of the world.

SIGNOR PIETRO D'OLIVERA'S

200 EDUCATED WHITE RATS

Perform a great variety of amusing and interesting tricks; Children especially find this exhibition replete with interest.

The Aquarial Garden,

Occupying one of the large Halls of the Mnseum, is of itself an Exhibition worth more than the cost of Admission to the entire Museum. Its numerous crystal ponds of River and Ocean water, abounding with Living Fish from nearly every River and Sea, are alive with interest to all classes. One tank has 8 LARGE SPECKLED BROOK TROUT, the largest and finest ever seen together; another has 12 BEAUTIFUL SEA HORSES, the most interesting tiny inhabitants of the great deep, the heads and necks of which resemble, in their graceful curves, those of the horse. No visitor should fail seeing them. Indeed, every tank in the entire collection is replete with interest.

THE LIVING HAPPY FAMILY

In the upper Saloon, is always surrounded with a crowd of smiling faces.

THE LIVING MONSTER SNAKES are more wonderful than pleasing, yet always surrounded by crowds of interested spectators.

THE LIVING LEARNED SEAL is regarded universally, as a "*Beautiful Creature!*" and his sparkling eyes are the admiration, if not the envy, of many of his fair admirers. These, and many more curiosities, are all to be seen at all hours, while EVERY AFTERNOON AND EVENING during the entire Holiday Season there will be

SUPERB DRAMATIC PERFORMANCES,

and on CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR DAYS these Performances will be given nearly EVERY HOUR, Day and Evening, that every visitor shall be enabled to see one such performance, as well as all the Curiosities.

☞ To add still further to the interest of THIS GREAT FESTIVE SEASON, the Manager has expended over Seven Thousand Dollars in the preparation of a New Holiday Piece, never before seen in America, entitled,

THE BOWER OF BEAUTY,

OR, THE

HOME OF THE FAIRIES

In the Enchanted Forest, in which occurs a

GORGEOUS MECHANICAL SCENE

By Randall, of London, in which appear

40 BEAUTIFUL YOUNG LADIES,

NYMPHS OF THE AIR.

This scene will be one of dazzling splendor, the most magnificent thing of its kind ever gotten up in this country, and will alone repay fourfold the cost of admission to the entire Museum. It will be produced every Afternoon and Evening during the entire Holiday season, and at each performance on Christmas and New Year days.

Admission to all only 25 cts. Children under 10 years, 15 cts.

Wynkoop, Hallenbeck & Thomas, Book and Job Printers, 113 Fulton St., N. Y.

Illustration 6: Handbill, 1864

As for the physical building itself, Barnum seems to have paid careful attention to dispersing rest areas, state-of-the-art lighting, food stands, souvenir stands and individual attractions throughout the Museum, aside from the major saloons where the bulk of the collections were displayed. While these additions may have helped Barnum to increase profits by extending the visitor's stay, they also served to meet some of the visitor's primary needs. "Visitor comfort is an important prerequisite for visitor learning in museums," (Hein, 1998, p. 137), therefore it is important that Barnum met those needs for his visitors.

The Lecture Room was another space Barnum was able to differentiate as a learning environment for his visitors. After several renovations, the Lecture Room accommodated 3,000 visitors and offered a wide variety of programs. Indeed, Barnum stated that his "plan is to introduce into the lecture room highly moral and instructive domestic dramas, written expressly for my establishments and so constructed as to please and edify, while they possess a powerful *reformatory* tendency" (Saxon, 1983, p. 43). This concept of reform usually related to Barnum's personal interests such as temperance or abolishing slavery.

Barnum's American Museum was located on Broadway, in the heart of New York City. This location provided easy access for citizens of the poorer neighborhoods thereby anticipating the work of Jane Addams by several years. "Addams worked to overcome the gap between cultural institutions and lower-class neighborhoods by establishing settlement houses like Hull House. Addams believed that art had little worth if it did not grow out of experience" (Roberts, 1997, p. 31). Barnum was one of the first to make a museum visit affordable for lower-income families, offering a shared experience across class lines.

Free-choice learning at Barnum's American museum was demonstrated as children peered into the aquariums containing the first captured whales in America, as mothers entered their newborns into the baby shows and listened to doctors explain new trends in child-care, as thousands of visitors crowded into the Lecture Room to hear the tale of *The Drunkard*, as visitors peered into the scopes of the cosmoramas and were whisked away to Paris, and as men came in after work to decide for themselves if the Fejee mermaid was an authentic artifact, or an elaborate humbug.

Barnum the Constructivist

George Hein presents us with additional learning theories in his work *Learning in the Museum* (1998). Hein (1998) views museums as interpreters of cultures and contends:

> Museums need to have a conscious educational policy. If no conscious effort is made to adopt a theory of education, the museum's exhibitions, layout, and general atmosphere will still express a point of view about education and visitors will still receive powerful educational messages, but these may be mixed and/or contradictory and visitors may be confused. (pp. 14-15)

While we do not possess evidence that Barnum had a conscious policy toward education, we do know that learning and instilling a sense of wonder in his visitors was important to Barnum:

> The museum was trumpeted as 'a vast National Gallery' containing 'a million of things in every branch of Nature and Art, comprehending a Cycolopaediacal Synopsis of everything worth seeing and knowing in this curious world's curious economy. (Whalen, 2000, p. xxii)

While I agree with Hein (1998) that "the most important issues involved in understanding learning are derived from analyzing the actions of the learner rather than in probing the nature of the subject to be learned" (p. 189), Barnum's museum is situated in a history that is devoid of visitor studies, and I am unable to analyze these learner

accounts firsthand. In place of this, I look at Barnum as an educator, and the efforts that were put forth to create visitor experiences of an educational nature.

Hein agrees with Falk and Dierking (1998) that museums are informal learning environments with no set curriculum, optional attendance and no certifications (p. 7)–a concept akin to free-choice learning. While this has not changed since Barnum's museum days, what has changed are professional opinions on museum education: "By the late nineteenth century…it was assumed that people would learn, be enlightened, and be entertained by their visits to museums" (Hein, 1998, p. 5). While this relaxed concept of education is still held in some institutions, Hein (1998) explains: "Learning is now seen as an active participation of the learner with the environment" (p. 6). This belief places more importance on the visitor's experience than on the museum's collections, and informs Hein's development of educational theories.

Hein (1998) presents four theories of education, informed by a *theory of knowledge* ("what do we think knowledge is and how is knowledge acquired" [p. 16]), *a theory of learning* ("do we believe that learning consists of the incremental addition of individual bits of information into the mind or do we think that learning is an active process that transforms the mind of the learner" [p. 16]), and *a theory of teaching* ("the application of the conceptions about how people learn and what it is they learn" [p. 16]).

The theory of knowledge can be imagined as a continuum with two opposing beliefs at either end. On one end is the concept of *realism*–"that the 'real' world exists out there, independent of any ideas about it that humans may have" (Hein, 1998, p. 17). At the opposite extreme is *idealism*–"according to this view knowledge exists only in the minds of people and does not necessarily correspond to anything 'out there' in nature" (Hein, 1998, p. 17). Through my research I maintain that Barnum's beliefs would align closer to idealism. Several of the objects he exhibited, including the Fejee mermaid,

offered multiple interpretations through labels, newspaper articles, interviews, and lectures, providing many voices and encouraging visitors to make up their own minds about the "reality" of the object. Taken to the extreme, it did not matter to Barnum whether an object was "real," it was the interpretation of the visitor that counted. An example:

> Barnum himself told the story of once being approached by a gentleman who sought the club that killed Captain Cook in the South Seas. Although he knew that he lacked the item, Barnum rummaged through his store-rooms until he found an appropriately menacing specimen. He hastily labeled it 'The Capt. Cook Club' and showed it to the incredulous gentleman, who then deflated Barnum by stating that six other museums had already produced the 'authentic' artifact. (Coe & Scott, 1988, p. 4)

While in this case the visitor had previous knowledge that came to bear on his interpretation, this did not stop Barnum from continuing to encourage visitors to actively construct their own realities when viewing his collections. Roberts (1997) agrees with this theory of knowledge: "What matters is not the thing itself but the manner in which it is experienced" (p. 104).

Theories of learning can be viewed as opposing extremes as well. Hein (1998) contrasts *passive learning* that is transmitted to a person in small bits with *active learning* in which people construct their own knowledge. In this debate, Barnum seems to have believed in the engagement with active learning. Through an examination of American Museum catalogues, I believe there was not an effort made by Barnum to expand a visitor's knowledge about a particular topic through incremental learning in a single exhibition. Rather, saloons were filled with multiple types of exhibitions that would have encouraged learners to actively choose artifacts that interested them and to engage at various levels with those objects.

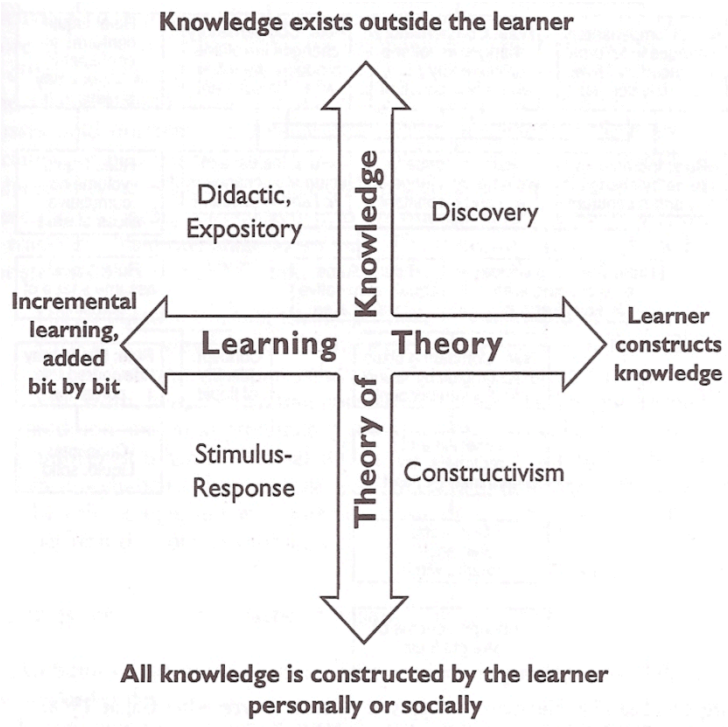


Illustration 7: Hein's education theories

Hein intersects the two continua and describes four educational theories. From Barnum's supposed positions on the theories of learning and knowledge, I believe Hein would classify him as a "constructivist." This theory offers "a recognition that in order to learn the active participation of the learner is required…learners use both their hands and minds" (Hein, 1998, p. 34). Barnum was able to facilitate this participation because visitors would directly interact with exhibits such as the living curiosities by observing and speaking to them, thereby engaging the mind, or, by petting many animals in the menagerie which was allowed, thus activating the hands of visitors and their senses of touch and smell.

In discussing pedagogy for constructivism, Hein (1998) explains, "The organizing principles will inevitably permit visitors to pick and chose what subject they want to

pursue, or even what branch of the subject. The idea that a topic can be arranged linearly, like a text, will not even be considered" (p. 38). Although catalogues were sold in order to orient visitors and provide them with more information about the exhibits, the museum itself could be approached in a non-linear way and visitors could easily move throughout the museum in a non-sequential order.

Barnum's emphasis on the visitor not only made him a successful businessman, but also enabled his museum to become unique in anticipating visitor needs in the nineteenth-century. Although he was criticized for "exploiting the gullibility of the masses to build a center of popular entertainment" (Orosz, 1990, p. 169), the fact that he was successful and challenged people to think for themselves should not be considered a negative effect.

Barnum the Edutainer

Roberts (1997), in her book *From Knowledge to Narrative,* "tells the story of education in museums. It is a story about the emergence of a new profession, and it is the story of a revolution—in values, knowledge and power" (p. 2). Among the ideas put forth by Roberts in this volume is the "notion that knowledge is socially constructed and shaped by individuals' particular interests and values…[and that] objects, it follows, hold multiple stories and meanings, and, depending on the context, all of those stories and meanings are potentially valid" (Roberts, 1997, pp. 2-3). These concepts have been discussed previously in the sections on free-choice learning and constructivism. The primary reason I selected Robert's work to apply to Barnum's concepts of education is because she validates the role of entertainment in education.

According to Roberts (1997): "conflict between museums' education and entertainment functions are being widely discussed today" (p. 20), and have been a topic

of discussion for museum professionals for many years. This issue is particularly relevant to Barnum's American Museum, as the museum was often seen solely as a source of entertainment. However, I argue that the Museum also had educational value. Roberts (1997) agrees with this assessment regarding Barnum and other early museum proprietors, and goes on to say, "historians who have found it easy to dismiss them as 'mere' entertainment have done early popular museums a disservice" (p. 25).

Historically it is believed that changing social orders and the rise of the middle class were instrumental in the movement for museums to embrace new initiatives:

> What came to be called entertainment in later years was born out of resistance to these early museums' ideals, which underscored class difference by privileging respectable values and ideals. According to Orosz, museums' initial shift to more popular forms of education were preceded by changes in society that saw the collapse of the aristocratic social order and the rise of a middle class wielding political influence. (Roberts, 1997, p. 24)

Barnum's American Museum emerged shortly thereafter into an environment that already embraced popular entertainment. Orosz (1990) argues another reason for a division between the science community and the masses was that

> The needs of science had become so specialized that a general museum could not hope to fulfill all of them. The times had changed, for 'when Peale began his Museum of Natural history, a museum might be *both* a popular attraction which served to enrich the proprietor *and* an institution for the promotion of science.' By '1841 this was no longer true. . . . the needs of science had wholly diverged from those of scientific popularizors.' (p. 167)

If this was the case, then Barnum might have held a belief that differed from Peale, regarding what was possible for educating the public. Rather than offering a traditional scientific education, Barnum created a wildly popular attraction that worked to redefine education in museums.

Roberts (1997) asserts: "Self-exploration, games, humor, even play itself have long been recognized for their role in promoting learning" (p. 20). To expand on this relationship, Roberts (1997) continues:

> Those who defended what was being castigated as 'entertainment' rested their case on two arguments: that entertaining methods can still lead to educational ends, and that entertainment is a perfectly legitimate end unto itself. The first was not a new idea. Educators had long recognized that visitors must first attend to an object for learning to even occur. The first step in the learning process, then, was to grab the viewer's attention….This argument was later embellished by the notion that entertainment was not simply a stepping-stone to education but the progenitor of the receptive state required for authentic learning to occur. In other words, its very nature—playful, enjoyable, and fun—evoked in people the optimum conditions for learning—openness, loss of self, and what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi called 'flow'. (pp. 39-40)

Examples of exhibits that might have been considered as "entertainment" or "play" in Barnum's American Museum included the living curiosities, plays performed in the Lecture Room, the glass-blowing exhibit, photo-booths, the creation of silhouettes, the working-model of Niagara Falls, and countless others. Truly, due to the interactive nature of some of these exhibits, visitors would have had engaging and entertaining experiences through which learning undoubtedly occurred.

While "the language of play and leisure still carries negative connotations that are deeply rooted in our social consciousness" (Roberts, 1997, p. 42), researchers argue the importance of these activities: "Csikszentmihalyi has asserted the ontological primacy of leisure activities. He argues they provide the source of meaning and criteria for evaluating all other life activities" (Roberts, 1997, p. 41). By offering the citizens of New York several options for spending their leisure time, within the same institution, Barnum would have contributed to enhancing the life experiences of his visitors.

Roberts (1997) also discusses the concept of a "Pinball effect" whereby in "a preponderance of hands-on exhibits, visitors have been observed moving around

haphazardly, pushing buttons and pulling levers, enjoying the effects but making no effort to understand them" (p. 18). In all descriptions of Barnum's American Museum, the visitors are described as orderly and accounts of spending up to eight hours exploring the exhibitions lead me to believe that a quick and haphazard run through of Barnum's Museum did not occur for many visitors.

REVIEW OF THE STUDY

The historical research gathered here provides a context of emerging nineteenth-century museums, a detailed account of Barnum's American Museum and its contents, and an examination of three contemporary museum education discourses that can be retroactively applied to Barnum's philosophies and actions. Each chapter works together to provide a more complete picture of Barnum and his activities, although it is not a study designed to be a comprehensive investigation of Barnum's entire life and career.

I used a historical research methodology to determine that Barnum's American Museum aligned with the educational discourses of free-choice learning, constructivism, and edutainment. I was not able to find specific information on education as it applied to Barnum's holdings in the art department, though I feel his philosophies of education would have applied to the entirety of his exhibitions.

As I asserted in my problem statement in Chapter One, many of the challenges that museums face today are not new. Barnum's American Museum shared the demands of long work-weeks, tough competition, and strong critics, yet emerged as one of the most successful institutions of all time. By investigating his strategies, modern practitioners may be able to recognize and secure time-tested techniques for success in their own institutions.

Aside from providing new information, my intent has been to clarify misconceptions of P.T. Barnum. While legend has made him out to be a larger than life character, this research depicts him as a hard working and earnest man who held deep concerns for his visitors.

BARNUM'S LEGACY

Regardless of Barnum's fame in careers outside museums, he has left a large mark on the museum industry. Two operating institutions still bear his name, and were built through funding and donations from his collections. The Barnum Museum in Bridgeport, Connecticut, and the Biology department (formerly the Department of Natural Science) at Tufts University, were two of Barnum's last philanthropic gestures. Jumbo, one of Barnum's famous elephants, remains the mascot at Tufts to this day.

Millions of visitors passed through the doors of Barnum's American Museum, so it is not surprising that many of them went on to become famous in their own rights. Several visitors credited their visits to Barnum's museum as influential:

> Peter Cooper [creator of the Cooper Union school] had been profoundly influenced throughout his life by the American Museum in New York… He was fascinated by virtually everything he saw at the American Museum, but he was particularly enchanted by the mechanical devices and the cosmorama, an exhibition of pictures viewed through peepholes to allow for special effects of perspective and lighting. (Orosz, 1990, p. 183)

And:

> Henry David Thoreau visited the American Museum in 1854, and then several times thereafter…the notable diarist George Templeton Strong was equally impressed with the aquaria, while Henry James remembered Barnum's lecture room as 'the true center of the seat of joy.' Great naturalists were also spawned at the museum. John Burroughs traced his first interest in ichthyology to competing for $100 in a museum-sponsored trout-catching contest. Dr. Albert S. Bickmore, founder of the American Museum of Natural History, went on his first collecting expedition, to Bermuda in 1862, at Barnum's expense. The list of established scientists who considered Barnum a friend and a source of specimens is

impressive: Louis Agassiz, Joseph Henry, Spencer Baird, and Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. (Orosz, 1990, pp. 228-229)

FURTHER RESEARCH

My research focused on a narrow feature of the life and work of P.T. Barnum. Beyond this, there are several avenues that could be explored to form a more complete historical picture. In particular, visitor accounts would be useful to uncover, if possible, for further support that learning occurred. Finding these accounts will be challenging but not impossible, as many nineteenth century citizens often wrote letters and kept diaries with descriptions of their activities and thoughts.

This study was limited to examining only three contemporary discourses of museum education. Perhaps an expansion of this study would be beneficial, where the researcher could seek to determine if there are other educational discourses that are applicable to Barnum's museum, and to identify what these discourses might be. If firsthand visitor accounts were to be found, they would greatly add to the body of research to draw from when correlating discourses with educational results.

Another direction that could be explored is the relationship between Barnum and other museum proprietors of the time, particularly Moses Kimball of the Boston Museum. The pair were in constant correspondence, and would often share exhibitions and ideas. Kimball, however, is remembered in a much more favorable light, and the Boston Museum went on to become a "legitimate" institution in the minds of early twentieth century scholars. It would be interesting to study how this transformation took place, and the nature of Barnum and Kimball's relationship.

A study of the artworks in both Barnum's Museum and his home would be practical if further primary sources are discovered. Comparisons could be made between

his personal aesthetic, as represented in his famously elaborate homes, and the artworks represented in the Museum.

Finally, this study only explores Barnum's career as a museum proprietor under an educational lens. It would be interesting to extend this inquiry to Barnum's later career in the circus. Did Barnum conduct his circus activities with education in mind? The added element of his partnership with Bailey may reveal new influences that affected Barnum's educational philosophies. Again, further research would need to be conducted to learn if this occurred.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that Barnum bridged the gap between elite, private museum collections, and commercialized Dime Museums. Barnum's American Museum developed from an emerging group of museums only decades old, and yet he revolutionized the way museums were presented.

Barnum has often been unfairly demonized as a money-grubbing showman. Unfortunately, Francis Henry Taylor, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, established this place in history for Barnum by perpetuating a phrase that was largely believed to have been by Barnum, but in reality was not: "'Barnum's dictum 'there's a sucker born every minute' has been one of the mottoes of our profession ever since'.… Taylor's contempt for the amateurism and the vulgarity of the pre-1870 museum world could not be clearer" (Orosz, 1990, p. 243).

Throughout this study I have worked to clarify Barnum's place in the history of museum education. My intent has been to shine a light on the educational attributes of Barnum's American Museum and to provide a view that Barnum would well have been considered a successful museum educator by today's standards. Looking at Barnum's

American Museum it is evident that free-choice learning, constructivism, and edutainment were demonstrated.

He carefully considered the physical factors of his museum, making it a safe and comfortable environment that he sought to make accessible to everyone. Exhibitions were mounted with both universal and specialized appeal. Direct access to authentic objects was provided for visitors, who could engage directly with animate and inanimate exhibitions. A focus on sociocultural learning was addressed and encouraged, and visitors were made the number one priority of Barnum's American Museum. While millions were entertained, they were simultaneously learning about their world and themselves.

In his last autobiography, Barnum related to readers his thoughts on visitor satisfaction, and reflected on edutainment in his own words: "When they came inside and paid to be amused and instructed, I took care to see that they not only received the full worth of their money, but were more than satisfied" (Barnum, 1873, p. 132). For thirty-three years, Barnum engaged and satisfied millions of visitors with the education he provided to them through his American Museum.

Appendix A

BARNUM'S MUSEUM ACQUISITIONS, SALES, AND FIRES

1841	Purchased the American Museum
1843	Purchased the "Parthenon" from Rubens Peale in New York City
1845	Purchased the Baltimore collection from Edmund Peale
1849	Took over Swaimes Museum in Philadelphia with a 10 year lease
1849	Purchased the Philadelphia Museum from Edmund Peale
1850	Sold the American Museum to John Greenwood, Jr. and Henry D. Butler
1851	Sold the Swaim operation in Philadelphia for $40,000 to Clapp Spooner
1851	Spring: Barnum's Great Asiatic Caravan, Museum, and Menagerie began touring
1860	Repurchased the American Museum from Greenwood and Butler
1860s	(dates unknown) Managed the "California Menagerie" of the famed Grizzly Adams
1862	Barnum's Aquarial Gardens in Boston opened under Barnum's management
1865	(July 13) Fire destroyed the first American Museum
1865	The second American Museum opened
1868	(March 3) Fire destroyed the second American Museum

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